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New Cinemas is a refereed academic journal devoted to the study of contemporary film around the world. It aims to provide a platform for the study of new forms of cinematic practice and a new focus on cinemas hitherto neglected in western scholarship. It particularly welcomes scholarship that does not take existing paradigms and theoretical conceptualisations as given; rather, it anticipates submissions that are refreshing in approach and that exhibit a willingness to tackle cinematic practices that are still in the process of development into something new.

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Editorial

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As *New Cinemas* publishes the first number of its sixth volume it seems appropriate to reflect briefly on its history and scope. Since its inaugural issue in 2002, the journal's rationale has always been to privilege work on 'new forms of cinematic practice'; thus the articles we have published have addressed a variety of cinemas (European, Asian, Latin American and others), but their principal focus has been on developing new approaches to these cinemas and their production. Thus, in scanning the fifteen issues to date it is possible, without wishing to ignore the range and reach of the articles published, to identify some key recurring theoretical questions: these include the impact of digital technologies on new narrative forms, issues of the national and the transnational, and a concern with formations of gender and sexuality in contemporary cinemas.

The articles in this issue engage with similar themes: the first article, by Eleftheria Thanouli, addresses recent accounts of 'World Cinema', particularly those by Dudley Andrew, to whose work her article constitutes a kind of response. Thanouli argues that it is necessary to map the global flow of post-classical narrative forms in order to adequately counter a binary model of world cinema.

The articles by Bangert and O'Leary both address the nexus of film and memory: Bangert's article on *The Grey Zone* situates this American account of one specific aspect of the Holocaust, the forced assistance in mass murder of the predominantly Jewish *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz, in relation to debates on cultural memory; he also argues for the need to recognise the film's function as a contribution to a body of discursive representations of the Holocaust, both fictional and non-fictional, and to understand how the film universalises the Holocaust in an attempt to transform it into a collective historical heritage.

Similarly, O'Leary examines a fictional film, Bellocchio's *Buongiorno notte*, which treats an event in recent Italian history that has been the subject of many representations, the kidnap and murder of the Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro in 1978. O'Leary argues persuasively that the film is less a reconstruction of the event itself than a self-conscious meditation on the role of the memory of Aldo Moro itself in Italian culture. The proliferation of discursive representations of both the Holocaust and the Moro murder (O'Leary points out it triggered Italy's first experience of 24-hour news coverage), can encourage us to relate both articles to ideas of 'new memory' which have become so influential in film and media studies (Hoskins 2001, 2004).

The final article, by Alice Bardan on Pawlikowski's *Last Resort*, discusses the film in relation to both its construction of Britain as a 'counter-utopia' and also the way in which the film opens up for the spectator questions of whiteness and its negotiation in a European context.

Catherine O'Rawe, *University of Bristol*

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Narration in World cinema: Mapping the flows of formal exchange in the era of globalisation

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Abstract

World cinema has become a popular concept in the film studies circles in an effort to arrange the growing terrain of national cinemas across the globe and compensate for a long-standing Eurocentric approach to film criticism. In my article I try to overcome some of the existing orthodoxies on the topic, such as the dichotomy between Hollywood cinema and the rest of the world, the American hegemony thesis and the hierarchical/linear models of analysis. By focusing on the narration of a number of films from across the globe, I trace a number of formal developments that urge us to reconsider the notion of western primacy in the production of cinematic forms and to seek new models of complex cultural interactions.

Keywords

World cinema
post-classical narration
network
transnational flow

The concept of World cinema has recently become a focus of great interest in film studies circles, as an increasing number of publications and course syllabi employ it as an umbrella term that helps us, on the one hand, to arrange the growing terrain of national cinemas across the globe, while, on the other, it tries to atone for our long-standing Eurocentric approach to film production.[1] Yet, to the extent that 'World cinema' is used to signify the large sum of national cinemas or to appease our feelings of guilt, the understanding of the dynamics of the global cinematic system is bound to remain limited.

A first attempt to widen the scope of the term and open up a new and impressively rich territory for film scholars was made by Dudley Andrew in his article 'An Atlas of World Cinema' (2004). The title of the article already hints at the ambitious scale of his perspective and, indeed, the choice of the word 'atlas' as a metaphor for conceptualising 'World cinema' proves to be invaluable. As he notes,

> Why not conceive an atlas of types of maps, each providing a different orientation to unfamiliar terrain, bringing out different aspects, elements, and dimensions? (. . .) a course or anthology looking out to world cinema should be neither a gazetteer nor an encyclopedia, futilely trying to do justice to cinematic life everywhere. Its essays and materials should instead model a set of approaches, just as an atlas of maps opens up a continent to successive views: political, demographic, linguistic, topographical, meteorological, marine, historical.
>
> (Andrew 2004: 10)

1 A selective list of relevant works is: Chapman (2003), Chaudhuri (2005), Gazetas (2000), Hill and Church Gibson (1998), Luhr (1987).

Although the typology of maps that he proposes and begins to sketch out, such as political, demographic or linguistic, is admittedly less apt for the cinematic phenomena, the notion of an Atlas with multiple maps, each capturing a different dimension, is crucial for enhancing our knowledge of World cinema and its manifold nuances.

The undertaking of this article will be to explore what Andrew calls the 'linguistic' map of World cinema, which concerns the formal and narrative parameters of films from around the world. The term 'linguistic' can be highly misleading not only because it resonates with some of the older discussions about whether cinema is a language or not but mainly because it suggests that narrative paradigms may figuratively be seen as national languages, which can generate several misconceptions. For that reason, I would like to suggest that we talk about a *narrational* map of World cinema, which drafts the various narrative paradigms that are at work to varying degrees at different corners of the globe.

Narration is indeed an integral part of most fiction films[2] but when it comes to it, a large number of stereotypes seem to prevail. The main conviction is that the classical narrative mode that crystallised in Hollywood during the era of studio filmmaking (1917–1960) is an American invention that became the dominant model in filmmaking worldwide. Indeed, Andrew refers to it as 'the one universally recognised language of the movies' against which other cinematic expressions from countries like West Africa, Ireland and Mainland China develop and measure themselves (14). This binary opposition between Hollywood and the rest results from Andrew's interesting gesture of using Franco Moretti's work on World literature as an exemplary model for studying World cinema. In an influential article called 'Conjectures on World Literature' published in the *New Left Review* in 2000, Moretti argued that the rise of the European novel and its influence on the rest of literary production around the globe is an emblematic case in World literature, which can help us conceptualise the latter as a system that consists of a core and a periphery and is governed by unequal interactions between these two constituent parts. One of his main conjectures is that

> (. . .) in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.
>
> (Moretti 2000: 58)

This is the argument that Andrew applies to the system of world cinema to conclude that the classical Hollywood model is the Latin of cinematic language and that most national cinemas construct their fictions in their 'local vernaculars', which constitute a sort of compromise between the Western (Hollywood) formula and the local story material. Although such a claim is not entirely incorrect, Andrew makes a crucial oversight; he fails to take into consideration Moretti's own update of his World literature account and the corrections that the latter implemented in his subsequent writings.

2 Narration is equally indispensable for non-fiction works but the theory of documentary filmmaking is considerably different from the theory of fiction, so I will leave this out of the scope of this article.

More precisely, Moretti's recent article called 'More Conjectures' was published three years after the first conjectures and aimed at revising some of his initial statements. In this updated version, he responds to some of his critics by acknowledging that his account of the interactions between the core and the periphery of the world literary system is overly simplistic. He notes:

> By reducing the literary world-system to core and periphery, I erased from the picture the transitional area (the semi-periphery) where cultures move in and out of the core; (. . .) In 'Conjectures', the diagram of forces was embodied in the sharp qualitative opposition of 'autonomous developments' and 'compromises'; but as that solution has been falsified, we must try something else.
>
> (Moretti 2003: 77)

In the light of Moretti's own revision, it is vital to reconsider the argument that the classical Hollywood cinema developed autonomously at the core of the World system and that the national cinemas of the periphery nurtured their discourses as a compromise between foreign influence and local reality.[3] If we begin to challenge the notion of Hollywood's autonomous birth and delve into the influences and the compromises that it took to create the stability of the classical narrative model, then we could perhaps start to explore the secret of its durable success and appeal around the world. We could even reverse the argument and claim that it was Hollywood that had to make the biggest compromise of all in order to be able to cater for the tastes of its highly diversified domestic market. As Donald Sassoon notes,

> Another reason why US culture was so 'good' was that the original market in which it was tested—its own domestic market—was extremely complex and diversified, quite different from the traditional European model. The American audience was an amalgam of people originating from different cultures. To be successful in France, one just had to please the French; in Italy, just the Italians. But to make it in the US one had to devise a product that would please, and delight, and be purchased by, the Irish and the Poles, Italians and Jews, Blacks and Germans, and so on. Hollywood's worldwide success in the era of silent movies arose from this home base.
>
> (Sassoon 2002: 125–126)

The primary lesson we take by looking into the contemporary system of World cinema is that a number of historical and critical assumptions need to be refuted if we are to investigate this system not only in its present form but also in the various forms it has taken since the inception of the cinematic medium. The relations between the core, the semi-periphery and the periphery and the way various nations shift positions in these areas is particularly thorny, rendering it difficult to trace the movement of influences and exchanges. The formulation of the classical model of narration in Hollywood entailed a complex set of interactions among various actors that cannot be easily captured by Moretti's first dual and then tripartite division

3 It is worth quoting at length here Moretti's full argument: 'So let me try again. "Probably all systems known to us have emerged and developed with interference playing a prominent role", writes Even-Zohar: "there is not one single literature which did not emerge through interference with a more established literature: and no literature could manage without interference at one time or another during its history". No literature without interference . . . hence, also, no literature without compromises between the local and the foreign. But does this mean that all types of interference and compromise *are the same?* Of course not: the picaresque, captivity narratives, even the *Bildungsroman* could not exert the same pressure over French or British novelists that the historical novel or the *mystéres* exerted over European and Latin American writers: and we should find a way to express this difference' (Moretti 2003: 79).

of the world system. And things become even more complicated when we look at the narrational options in the global cinematic landscape today.

To launch my own tentative chart of the narration in World cinema, I would like to look at some of the most recent developments in this domain, namely the emergence of a new mode of narration that I would like to call 'post-classical' partly because it appeared after the demise of the classical studio system and partly because it bears a complicated relation with the classical model.[4] From the late '80s and increasingly in the '90s and the new millennium a large number of directors from the United States (Steven Soderbergh, Darren Aronofsky or Paul Thomas Anderson), China (Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou), Hong Kong (Wong Kar-wai, Johnny To), Australia (Baz Luhrmann), South Korea (Park Chan-wook), Brazil (Fernando Meirelles) and Mexico (Alfonso Cuaron) have been sharing a common cinematic vocabulary that cannot be rooted in a single cinematic tradition. In the remaining part, I will outline some of the characteristics of this new vocabulary with an emphasis on its geopolitical coordinates in an effort to enrich the narrational map of our Atlas and highlight the stakes of this new cartography.

A new global vernacular: post-classical narration

My discussion of narration in World cinema will concentrate on the close textual analysis of four popular contemporary films that were set and made in four major cities: *Pulp Fiction* (1994) in Los Angeles, *City of God* (2002) in Rio de Janeiro, *Amélie* (2001) in Paris and *Chungking Express* (1994) in Hong Kong. All four films were shot by young native directors who sought to visualise their individual stories in a very localised setting by using, however, a remarkably similar repertory of filmmaking and storytelling techniques. Whether an incident takes place in an American diner, a Brazilian favela, the Parisian metro or the take-away in Chungking Mansions, we are invited to follow the action through a rather international and mainstream cinematic language that adheres to specific and consistent rules that are distinctly different from the well-established Latin of Classical Hollywood as well as from any other 'vernacular', such as art-cinema or parametric narration,[5] that we have encountered so far in the poetic history of cinema.

The examination here will focus on the key compositional elements of these films, starting from their plot construction. Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* portrays some events in the lives of five inexplicably linked characters: Jules (Samuel Jackson), Vincent Vega (John Travolta), Butch (Bruce Willis), Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) and Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman). The film is bracketed by an attempted robbery at a diner, while the main part is separated into three interwoven plot-lines. The first is called 'Vincent Vega & Marcellus Wallace's wife' and shows us Vincent, a hit man, reluctantly taking his gangster boss's wife, Mia, out for a night on the town. The second story is entitled 'The gold watch' and depicts the predicament of a boxer, Butch, who is paid by Marcellus Wallace, the gangster, to lose his upcoming fight. Butch chooses instead to win the fight and run with the money but fate brings him face to face with Marcellus and puts them both in the middle of an absurd situation. The

4 For the purposes of this article I will only sketch out the basic characteristics of what I call 'post-classical' narration in order to emphasize the issue of formal exchange in World cinema. I am aware of the fact that many theorists to this date question the existence of 'post-classical' narration and David Bordwell is the leading figure in this group. For a response to their reservations and a full account of post-classical narration see (Thanouli 2006).

5 For a detailed account of the various narrative paradigms in the history of the international fiction film see (Bordwell 1985).

third section is the 'Bonnie situation' and portrays a day in the working routine of Vincent and his partner Jules who end up averting the robbery at the diner, closing thus the film on a rather amusing note, despite the blood and violence that preceded.

Meirelles' *City of God* consists of an equally fragmented story-line that tries to capture the life in the 'city of God', a euphemistic name for one of Rio de Janeiro's most notorious slums, which was built in the 60s as a housing project. The film opens in medias res showing a young man called Rocket (Alexandre Rodrigues) trapped between an army of menacing gun-obsessed youngsters on one side and a number of policemen on the other. Rocket introduces himself in the voice-over and assumes his role as our narrator by taking us back in time and beginning the portrayal of an endless string of violent activities that govern the life in the favelas. The main focus is on the rise of a murderous criminal called Lil' Ze, who gradually gains control over all illegal activities in the area and spreads fear and dead bodies in his path. From start to finish, Rocket remains our guide in a highly convoluted plot that contains many characters and several episodes clearly marked by intertitles such as 'The story of Mane Galinha', 'A farewell to Bene', 'The life of a sucker' and 'The story of Zé Pequeno' to name a few.

My third example, Jeunet's *Amélie*, revolves around the life of a young woman called Amélie Poulain (Audrey Tautou) who devises elaborate schemes to change other people's lives and finds true romance with a young man, Nino (Mathieu Kassovitz). The structure of the film is highly episodic since the central character triggers several plotlines with her father, her colleagues at work and the people in her neighborhood, while she is pursuing Nino, the object of her affection. The multiplicity of the story-lines is made explicit from the start, as the narration spends the first fifteen minutes on a non-diegetic expository introduction of the principal characters, their likes and dislikes, and their everyday activities. The diegesis begins with Amélie accidentally discovering a box in her bathroom and then gradually opens up to the other subplots, which include Amélie playing hide and seek with Nino, keeping her lonely neighbor company, playing the role of the match-maker for her colleagues as well as the role of the avenger for the nasty grocer across her street.

Finally, in *Chungking Express* Wong Kar-wai accentuates the fragmented plot structure even more by splicing together two entirely separate stories that are presented successively and are joined with a freeze-frame. The first one portrays three days in the life of Officer 223 (Takeshi Kaneshiro), a 25-year-old cop, who is struggling to come to terms with the fact that his girlfriend May has left him for good. As he desperately wanders around the city, he meets a mysterious blonde woman, who is a drug smuggler and is having trouble with one of her drug deals. The second story features the life of another cop, Officer 663 (Tony Leung), who is also abandoned by his airhostess girlfriend and becomes the object of affection for another girl, called Faye. The two plotlines converge at the Midnight Express, a fast-food counter that both cops frequent, while the passage from the first to the second part is made when Officer 223 bumps accidentally into Faye (Faye Wong). Despite the loose structure, these two

stories share a large number of common motifs that unify their tone and create a significant coherence between them. The narration is dominated by the voice-overs of all four main protagonists who clarify their feelings and motives and thus regulate the flow of information.

A preliminary look into the narrative construction of these four films shows a clear preference for multiple protagonists who participate in different stories that diverge and converge at different paces within the same film. The classical formula that dictates a tight cause-and-effect chain of events is considerably loosened and the goals of the protagonists become piecemeal and provisional. The two classical plotlines – the formation of the heterosexual couple and the undertaking of a mission – remain persistently present but they acquire other dimensions, as they extend and bifurcate into various parallel or intertwined subplots. On the other hand, the films manage to guide the viewers into their story world and to maintain a basic level of coherence with the aid of various narrative devices such as voice-overs and intertitles.

Apart from the issue of causality and plot structure, the four films demonstrate a novel approach to the construction of their cinematic space. In contrast to the classical Hollywood prerogatives that sought to subordinate space and use it merely as a vehicle for the narrative logic, the films explore new ways for articulating spatial dimensions by taking full advantage of the possibilities of the movie screen. More specifically, they adopt an approach to cinematic space that emphasises its graphic qualities;[6] whereas the classical system depended on a photographic realism that favored staging in depth, linear perspective and central positioning, the new system opts for layered images full of special effects that display their artificiality. Moreover, the classical strategy of continuity editing is ceaselessly challenged and reworked through the new strategies of intensified continuity, such as fast cutting rates, use of extreme lens lengths, close framings and free-ranging camera movements (Bordwell 2002b). In addition, the temporal montage that was the dominant kind of montage in the classical tradition is now complemented by a spatial montage that allows different images to co-exist in the same frame, blurring the distinction between the space 'in frame' and 'out of frame' and breaking down the logic of one image/one screen.

Some examples can successfully illustrate this pattern: *City of God* hits the ground running, opening with a spasmodic montage of close-up images from a market: a knife is sharpened against a black granite surface, chickens are plucked and chopped, vegetables are sliced and people are dancing samba. A few seconds later, a half-plucked chicken manages to free itself from its leash causing a chaotic chicken chase in the streets, which is shot with a frantic cutting pace that competes with the rhythm of the music. When our narrator, Rocket, confronts the chicken and is caught between the two opposing groups, the camera makes a 360° revolving movement twice in order to show us in one take the compromising situation. Then it starts rotating repeatedly and a graphic match-cut takes us back to the past. This scene is indicative of the overall style of the film, which uses extensively the techniques of intensified continuity in order to transmit the energy of its action while it frequently employs

6 As Lev Manovich explains in his account of 'digital cinema', the advent of digital technologies prioritised the graphic and painterly qualities of the image over the photographic ones, reversing the hierarchy between traditional cinema and other peripheral cinematic types like animation and the avant-garde. The strategies that were once pushed to the margins of the filmmaking practice because they were too artificial or self-reflexive, such as back projections, collages and optical tricks, are now coming back with a vengeance to express the mainstream logic of computer design see (Manovich 2001).

split-screens that cover various portions of the screen as well as superimpositions of letters that make various comments on the images.

Moving on to *Amélie*, one cannot help noticing the relentless movement of the camera that blatantly plays the role of the monstrator by lurking around the characters and capturing the best possible view of their actions. Apart from the view, however, the camera tries to emulate the mood of each scene rendering, for example, the feeling of excitement with violently brisk moves or the romantic atmosphere with fluid breezy movements. This expressive use of the camera is also complemented with some standard techniques, such as push-ins, whip-pans, extravagant crane shots and spiralling overheads. As far as the editing is concerned, the film makes an unsparing use of both traditional and spatial types of montage. The cutting pace in the linear editing is generally fast but on certain occasions it becomes impossible to follow as the images flash only for split seconds on the screen. This is particularly common in the sequences that introduce the various characters in the beginning, as well as in the various flashforwards and flashbacks. On the other hand, the spatial montage imitates the logic of cartoons and animation by constructing the screen as a multi-windowed surface that depicts different types of reality simultaneously. For example, during the conversation between Amélie and the shop assistant at the erotic store the former's mental images are superimposed on the left side of the frame. In addition, the entire film comprises numerous examples of stylistic montage[7] where different types of image formats, especially black-and-white film clips, are combined either sequentially or within the same frame.

Similarly, in *Chungking Express* Wong Kar-wai experiments with disruptive visual effects and refuses to be constrained by the specific and limited options that classical continuity allows. In this case, the style of the film is rendered highly self-reflexive through the use of fractured compositions, jump-cuts, different color schemes and jerky camera movements. For instance, the entire opening scene is shot with the step-printing method,[8] giving a captivating sense of simultaneous animation and suspension and creating a blurring impressionistic look. An intense musical score accompanies the camera as it follows a mysterious woman in a blonde wig, sunglasses and raincoat while she is walking into Chungking Mansion. Her encounter with the other protagonist, who is a cop in plainclothes, becomes intelligible to us only with the help of the voice-over, as the images are too graphic and blurry for us to fully grasp the action.

On the other hand, *Pulp Fiction* is less adventurous in its spatial construction compared to the other three films as well as to Tarantino's latest work, and particularly the hyperkinetic *Kill Bill vol. I & II* (2003–2004). Here, Tarantino employs the classical techniques in a playful manner by emphasising to the extreme the shot/reverse-shot pattern in the conversation scenes and obliterating completely the establishing shots, while he often intercuts the action with extreme close-ups of faces and objects. As the film progresses, he indulges increasingly in the style of intensified continuity and especially the use of 'singles', overhead shots and prowling steadicam movements. Some of the most graphic scenes include the long spiralling movement around the telephone booth when Butch makes a

7 Manovich defines 'stylistic montage' as the juxtaposition of diverse images in different media. (Manovich 2001: 159).

8 Step-printing is a technique they use in post-production to show fast action moving slowly via duplicated frames.

phone call, the black back-projections when Vince drives his car to Mia's home and, of course, the moment when Mia forms a dotted square with her fingers on the screen and says to Vincent: 'Don't be a. . . .'

Apart from its spatial characteristics, however, *Pulp Fiction* is quite memorable for its temporal construction and the way it completely defies the classical conception of time. Together with causality and space, time is the third fundamental parameter in the narration of a film and all four case studies here illustrate an identical tendency to ignore the norms of the classical realistic representation that ordains the emulation of the analogue movement of time. The predilection for multiple story-lines, on the one hand, and the wide use of digital techniques in the phase of post-production, on the other, has brought in significant alterations in the system of time in this new narrative paradigm.

As far as the temporal order is concerned, the films tend to portray the events in the plot in a non-linear manner by constantly making backward or forward movements in the story time with self-conscious and blatantly signalled flashbacks and flashforwards. Moreover, a popular choice seems to be the structure of the loop, as in *Pulp Fiction* and *City of God*, which open at a certain point in time, then make a long leap into the past and eventually return to the opening scene to pick it up from there.

Furthermore, the quality of duration is dealt with in various ways with an evident emphasis on the strategy of reduction and expansion, which render the cinematic time exceptionally palpable. The four films under examination often compress the screen time with fast-motion cinematography to accentuate aspects of the action or they expand the duration of the story both with slow-motion and with the insertion of non-diegetic shots or even sequences. And since the time in these narratives can move back and forth or go quickly and slowly, it can also pause for a while. Freeze-frames are a common device that can appear at any point in the film in order to signal the closure of a section of the story, as in *Chungking Express*, or to stop the image and give the audience time to register the information, as in *City of God* and *Pulp Fiction*.

Lastly, frequency is the third category in the system of time and here it, too, presents some interesting variations from the classical norm. Both in the *City of God* and *Pulp Fiction* some events are re-played from a different perspective in order to reveal new aspects of the action, breaking thus the taboo on the repeating form (*narrating n times what happens once*), which is forbidden in the classical model simply because it is not realistically justifiable.[9] As time in this new mode of narration becomes flexible and multi-directional, some of the long-standing rules of the classical tradition are increasingly challenged.

Overall, the textual analysis of these four contemporary films, which come from very different origins, illustrates that a new mode of narration has begun to take shape in the hands of a group of international filmmakers who challenge the Latin of Classical Hollywood cinema and establish a new set of narrational rules and strategies for telling us their stories. In fact, these rules not only form a paradigm of their own but also reflect the wider changes in the audiovisual terrain, which is characterised by unprecedented media convergence and radical technological innovations.

9 The idea of the 'repeating form' comes from Genette see (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 121).

In other words, the post-classical narration is not a haphazard occurrence but rather a cinematic phenomenon in direct dialogue with the latest trends in new media, television advertising and 'hypermediated aesthetics'.[10] And that partly explains why these films are so popular with young media savvy audiences who can enjoy following the trails of fragmented plotlines and can easily adjust to swift editing patterns and temporal jumps. Without a doubt, the large-scale social and cultural dimensions of the new cinematic forms are fascinating as well as far-reaching but they could not be exhausted here. What needs to be discussed, however, at this point is how the emergence of post-classical narration in places like the United States, Hong Kong, Brazil and France urges us to reconsider the transactions in the system of World cinema, as the relations between the core, the semi-periphery and periphery are continually re-shuffled.

Exploring the flows of influence

If we want to begin to understand why these films look so similar even though their settings and thematic concerns are so different, we have to – in the first instance – suspend Andrew's claim that the West provides the formula and then the rest of the world adapts it to the local material. In the case of post-classical narration it is particularly difficult to support the primacy of Western cinema in the creation of discursivity. Even though most discussions around post-classicism in the literature so far involve American films and directors, my close analysis shows clearly that the post-classical is not only a Western affair. The synchronicity with which the new norms arise has direct roots in the dynamics of the system of World cinema, which nowadays is becoming increasingly strong and influential. Thus, we can begin to refine our approach to World cinema, arguing that 'World' in this case should not mean 'global' – in the sense of all the cinemas of the world – but rather 'international' or 'transnational', entailing structures that arise and transactions that occur across national borders.[11] And this is exactly where our focus should be. It is these structures and transactions that we should begin to chart in the Atlas of World cinema and the developments in the narration that I have highlighted can be used as a compass for this purpose.

But let us go back to Moretti for a moment. In his updated account, he concedes that all forms are created through interference and compromise among different cultural sources. Yet, he points out that the system of World cinema is highly asymmetrical and, therefore, the interactions among unequal players result in the fact that the forms of the core travel better than those of the periphery. What is considerably different today, however, is that the globalisation of the mechanisms of production, distribution and exhibition has complicated – even if it has not completely abolished – the distinction between the core and the periphery, as it has built an infrastructure that facilitates enormously international conversation between modes, forms and practices from different corners of the world. Granted, economic inequalities are still pivotal but the flow of ideas, technologies and media policies is not unidirectional. The close narrative analysis of the films illustrates that the common cinematic vocabulary that a group of international filmmakers developed is the result of

10 The term 'hypermediacy' is introduced in Jay David Bolter and Robert Grusin's book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999) as a representational logic that opposes the logic of transparent immediacy by privileging fragmentation and heterogeneity and by foregrounding the materiality of representation.

11 Here I am paraphrasing Prendergast's argument about World literature. (Prendergast 2001: 106).

multi-directional influences that cannot be reduced to the model of the American cultural hegemony.

These complex cultural dynamics in the era of globalisation have been aptly described by Joseph Straubhaar, who coined the term 'asymmetrical interdependence' to describe 'the variety of possible relationships in which countries find themselves unequal but possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in politics, economics, and culture' (Straubhaar 1991: 39). By arguing that the flow of ideas and media develops into an asymmetrical flow, Straubhaar underlines that the various international players become interdependent for innovation both in terms of form and content and, therefore, the lesser-developed countries have the opportunity to contribute to the global media flow. As far as the system of World cinema is concerned, the concept of asymmetrical interdependence helps us realise that substantially more complex and flexible paradigms are necessary to shed light on the global flows of cinematic discourses in this increasingly multifaceted and globally interconnected world. The hierarchical model of core/semi-periphery/periphery that Moretti introduced is no longer able to capture the fine nuances of World cinema where the opposition between Hollywood and the rest is no longer pertinent.[12]

On the other hand, before rushing to establish a new model or schema in replacement of the long-standing hierarchies, it is important to engage in research that works in a bottom-up manner and pays close attention to details. My textual analysis here already tried to illustrate that the latest developments in the area of narration come simultaneously from different origins, making it impossible for us to argue that changes in plot construction or spatiotemporal axes are an American invention that was swiftly picked up by the weaker national cinemas. And this is just a small sample. If we are to survey the narrational map of World cinema today – and even more so if we want to find its correlations with the other maps, – then we have to focus on the details. Prendergast says 'the devil, as ever, is in the detail' and Moretti adds that 'God lies in the detail'.[13] This is one of the rare occasions when God and devil seem to agree. We should certainly take advantage of it.

12 A strong criticism of binary models in the study of World cinema is aptly voiced by Lucia Nagib who calls for a 'positive definition of world cinema'. In her article that bears this title, she scolds the majority of scholars who exclude Hollywood from the discussion of World cinema and promote the dichotomy between center and periphery (Nagib 2006). Her tentative suggestions for an inclusive definition and a multi-faceted methodology are certainly on the right track but at the same time show that we have only begun to grasp the stakes of this debate.

13 Both writers agree that we need a careful descriptive analysis of system of culture in order to understand how it works. This consensus on the method of analysis is illustrated in the following quote: 'A critical reconstruction of the history of film, and of its present, will eventually offer an answer. From the viewpoint of method, however, the crucial point is the one made by Christopher Prendergast in his review of Pascale Casanova's *République mondiale des lettres*: when trying to understand the world system of culture, "a single, generalizing description misses too much and is destined to do so, if it is offered as *the* description'. This, of course, is just as true for the quantitative evidence I have used as for the study of individual

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directors, or film genres: the solution lies in multiple layers of description and explanation, linked together by a chain of successfully analysed "details" (Prendergast again). God lies in the detail—perhaps. Our understanding of culture certainly does'. (Moretti 2001: 101).

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Changing narratives and images the Holocaust: Tim Blake Nelson's film *The Grey Zone* (2001)

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Abstract

This article situates the depiction of the Holocaust in Tim Blake Nelson's The Grey Zone *(2001) within the discourse of cultural memory. It demonstrates how the film transgresses established aesthetic and ethical boundaries of representation with the aim of constructing a different image of the Jewish Holocaust victim. By depicting the forced assistance of the predominantly Jewish* Sonderkommando *in the extermination process,* The Grey Zone *challenges the frequently dichotomised portrayal of victims and perpetrators. Moreover, the film subverts the image of a homogenous and passive Jewish victim group by staging the* Sonderkommando *revolt which occurred at Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1944. In terms of narration, Nelson avoids stereotypical patterns of melodrama by drawing upon popular film genres such as the urban resistance movie. With regard to iconography, the explicit representation of the exercise of violence upon the human body raises questions about the limits of representation, questions which appear to form a part of the director's strategy to reaffirm the significance of the Holocaust for collective memory.*

Keywords

filmic Holocaust representation
cultural memory
Sonderkommando
Primo Levi
body images

The attempts to envision the Holocaust with the narrative and visual means of film date back as far as 1947, when the Polish survivor Wanda Jakubowska shot the drama *Ostatni Etap/The Last Stop* on the site of the former extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. The 'return' of the history of the Holocaust 'as film' (Kaes 1989: 9–42) which has since then endured and which saw a steady increase during the '90s, has been accompanied by intense discussion on the legitimacy, adequacy, and value of such filmic representations. But regardless of the standpoint that one assumes in this respect, there remains no doubt that films form an essential part of cultural Holocaust memory and exercise a powerful influence on our historical consciousness (Reichel 2004: 12/13). In this article, I will investigate the present tendencies of this form of cultural memory through an exemplary analysis of Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2001), a recent American feature film dealing with the revolt of the *Sonderkommando* ('Special Commando') which took place at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 October 1944. The film appears to indicate a qualitative change in filmic Holocaust memory, as it challenges the widespread image of Jews being murdered as a homogenous and largely passive victim group. My aim is to demonstrate which narrative and iconographic

strategies Nelson employs to revise that notion and to discuss to what extent *The Grey Zone* might indicate a move towards a more adequate historicisation of Jewish victimhood.

The independent film production *The Grey Zone*, based on a theatre play of the same name which Nelson published in 1996, is arguably the most explicit depiction of the industrial extermination process to date. In 1998, Nelson succeeded in convincing Millennium Films to finance the production of a film adaptation, despite the fact that the film was not expected to be profitable, due to its grim subject matter and realist style. Although the budget was limited to four million dollars, Nelson managed to assemble a cast of recognisable faces. Moreover, in casting Mira Sorvino, Steve Buscemi and Harvey Keitel, he was able to recruit a number of high-profile actors, the latter of which also became executive producer of the film. The most frequently discussed choice of actor was David Arquette as Hoffman, primarily because of his role in the slasher movie *Scream* (Craven 1996) and its two sequels (1997 and 2000). Nelson justified his decision by pointing to the connection between the 'goofy characters' embodied by Arquette and the 'ability to play vulnerability and shame in dramatic characters' (Wood 2007). In May 2000, three months before *The Grey Zone* was shot in Bulgaria, the production designer Maria Djurkovic oversaw the construction of two replica crematorium buildings, built ninety per cent to scale. To create an impression of authenticity, Djurkovic not only consulted the original architectural plans in the Imperial War Museum in London, but also utilised stones from abandoned farm houses to imitate the texture of the original complex. The director of photography was Russell Lee Fine, who had already worked with Nelson on his earlier films *Eye of God* (1997) and *O* (2001). The high degree of influence which Nelson maintained during all stages of the production process is illustrated by the fact that he not only functioned as writer and director, but also as one of the editors of the film.

The Grey Zone was released in American and Canadian cinemas by Lionsgate Entertainment in October 2002 and received mixed reviews. As Baron (2008: 257) has summarised, '[w]hat distinguished the positive from negative reviews was whether the critic believed that the depths of human depravity manifested in the operation of the extermination camp could ever be authentically represented'. Perhaps the most radical criticism was voiced by Manohla Dargis in the *Los Angeles Times*, who argued that the mere attempt to aestheticise a crematorium was inherently trivialising (Dargis 2002). Dargis renewed general doubts about the representability of the Holocaust by contending that 'the crimes committed at Auschwitz were unspeakable' and 'beyond what entertainment cinema, which demands realism but not necessarily the truth, can show us'. Occasionally, criticism of the film was grounded in a comparison with the treatment of the *Sonderkommando* uprising in the documentary *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985). In this vein, Leslie Camhi from *The Village Voice* expressed his scepticism towards a fictionalisation of the predicament of the *Sonderkommando* by stating that 'no actor has ever matched the chilling testimony of the men in *Shoah*' (Camhi 2002). Nelson responded to this kind of criticism in the preface to the published screenplay. While

conceding that the Holocaust represented a singular event, he argued that to place it in 'an area so far beyond that of other tragedies that it becomes untouchable for certain kinds of artistic expression is not only self-righteous, but also self-defeating' (Nelson 2003: xiv). Among the defenders of the film was the eminent American film critic Roger Ebert who stated in the *Chicago Sun-Times*: 'I have seen a lot of films about the Holocaust, but I have never seen one so immediate, unblinking and painful in its materials' (Ebert 2002). Similar praise was voiced by Stanley Kauffmann in *The New Republic*, who deemed the screenplay 'tight and forceful, free of heroics and rhetoric' (Nelson 2002: xvii). While conceding that the film might not add much to the knowledge which many adult viewers already have of the Holocaust, Kauffmann regarded its treatment of the subject matter to be of exceptional artistic value. Despite these positive voices, *The Grey Zone* had a limited run in American cinemas of only nine weeks, and at the highpoint of its distribution was showing in merely thirty-six cinemas nationwide. Although the film was subsequently released in Spain (2001) as well as in Germany, Italy and Israel (2005), it has so far not been distributed in the United Kingdom.

My analysis of *The Grey Zone* is based on the assumption that films constitute a vital component of cultural memory as they ensure the transfer of collective experience and knowledge through cultural signs. By combining certain narrative and iconographic patterns, they endow the historical events depicted with meaning and transfer them into medial archives. Filmic representations of the Holocaust thus function as media of cultural storage, which increasingly substitute original testimony. Furthermore, I regard films as forums of social discourse, which by means of their subject and their *mise-en-scène* allow conclusions about the discourses prevailing within a given society (Kaes 1989: 195–98; Koch 2002: 412–22). Such an approach does not primarily aim at comparing the filmic vision with the historical knowledge about the events represented. Instead, it pays special attention to the way in which the film's sequences relate to the spectator's horizon of expectation, as the credibility of the filmic representation depends on its reference to collective knowledge. The historical vision conveyed by a film interacts with the historical ideas of the spectator, either confirming or questioning them. Finally, I intend to suggest that Holocaust films should not simply be examined and judged by moral standards, but scrutinised for the complexity with which they represent history. In general terms, this complexity can be traced by examining whether a film exhibits a level of self-reflection through which the historical vision is revealed as a construction (Rosenstone 1995: 3–13).

Especially since the four-part epic *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (Chomsky 1978), filmic memory of the extermination of European Jewry has been dominated by the genre of melodrama. As Marcia Landy has shown, melodrama represents an affective form of remembering, which responds to the social need of mourning the Jews murdered in the Holocaust as innocent victims (Landy 1996: 229–34).[1] Thus, Marvin Chomsky's *Holocaust*, which illustrated the major stages and sites of the 'Final Solution' by narrating the fate of a German-Jewish family, provided the spectator with the possibility of a cathartic identification with the

1 For an understanding of films as an expression of social mourning work see Santner 1990: 1-56.

victims. By contrast, Nelson's *The Grey Zone* resists the genre of melodrama, as the film subverts the dominant image of Jews as a homogenous and passive victim group and thereby complicates a simple identification on the part of the spectator. Instead, Nelson draws attention to the forced assistance in mass murder which the mostly Jewish members of the *Sonderkommandos* exercised in the extermination camps and furthermore depicts an act of their resistance. Through a 'liberation from the ritual of mourning' (Köppen/Scherpe 1997: 6) as perpetuated by melodrama, Nelson – himself a member of the second generation after the Holocaust – aims at revising the dominant image of Jewish victimhood and at establishing a novel aesthetics of representation. Hence, his film exemplifies how the frequently addressed change of generation in Holocaust memory creates a space for a recontexualisation of the historical events.

In his preface to the film's screenplay, Nelson is eager to emphasise that *The Grey Zone* was not a Holocaust-film in the ordinary sense of the term. Instead of pretending to be a historical document, his film attempted 'to strike at the essence of the predicament faced by the *Sonderkommandos*', which he conceives as the ethical dilemma either to contribute to the extermination of their own people or to be killed. By depicting this dilemma, Nelson intends to confront the spectator with questions that in his view provided troubling insight into the nature of human morality and indeed the human condition as such: 'What would I do to save my own life? How far would I go in sacrificing my own morality?' Nelson's second aim is to challenge the dichotomised perception of perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust. By referring to Primo Levi's homonymous essay (1988: 22–51), he affirms that *The Grey Zone* questioned the prevailing image of National Socialists as evil perpetrators on the one hand, and of Jews as innocent victims on the other. Instead, his film drew attention to the more ambiguous aspects of the space which separated the victims of the Holocaust from its perpetrators, thus challenging the demonic stylisations of National Socialists and the hagiographic transfigurations of Jews alike (Nelson 2003: ix). I will now scrutinise Nelson's strategy more closely by, first, discussing the main narrative features of *The Grey Zone*, and, second, by highlighting some peculiarities of the film's iconographic design.

Narrative designs

In order to dramatise the ethical dilemma faced by the *Sonderkommando*, the film combines several historical events which actually did not occur simultaneously. Thus, it connects the *Sonderkommando* revolt which broke out in the crematoria II and III of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 October 1944 with the incident of a girl who survived a gassing. This incident, which is reported in the memoirs of the Hungarian-Jewish pathologist Miklòs Nyiszli, happened some time before the *Sonderkommando* uprising.[2] Another intervention in the chronology of events regards the deportation and mass-murder of Hungarian Jews, which, the film suggests, have reached their zenith, whereas in reality the process was concluded at the beginning of July 1944 (Braham 1994: 465). Through this correlation of the *Sonderkommando* revolt with the discovery of the girl, Nelson creates a dramaturgy which highlights the inmates' moral dilemma in opposite and

2 The girl was immediately shot by SS-Oberscharführer Erich Muhsfeldt, see Nyiszli 1993: 114–120.

complementary ways: while the desperate revolt of the *Sonderkommando* members against the SS represents an attempt at moral self-assertion to the outside, the inmates' effort to regain their moral integrity through the rescuing of the girl constitutes an attempt at moral self-assertion on the inside. Amidst the inhuman condition of their 'work' in the crematorium, the discovery of the girl causes the inmates to rediscover their humanity, and incites them to resist mass-destruction at least in this one case.

Images of children have a long tradition in Holocaust films, partly because they easily activate mechanisms of empathy and identification with the victims of genocide, and partly because the killing of children constitutes one of the fundamental taboos of civilisation which were radically transgressed in the 'Final Solution'. Accordingly, *The Grey Zone* highlights the girl as a symbolic figure, standing in for the millions of nameless victims of the Holocaust. Such an interpretation is suggested above all by the sacrificial connotation of her white dress, which evokes the idea of a perpetual ritual of murder. Consequently, the shooting of the girl near the end of the film comes to represent the killing of the countless many. In view of Nelson's criticism of the melodramatic treatment of the Holocaust by directors like Steven Spielberg, the question arises as to what extent the portrayal of the girl in *The Grey Zone* differs from that of the girl in the red coat in *Schindler's List*. Interestingly, in both films the sight of the girl provokes a change in the moral attitude of the protagonist. As Schindler observes the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto from his privileged position upon an adjacent hill, he is visibly appalled by the atrocities committed against the Jews. His decision to attempt to save them appears to be taken precisely at the moment his eye (and that of the spectator) is caught by the girl in the red coat, following her through the scenario of destruction below. Similarly, when Hoffman finds the still-breathing girl in the gas chamber, he is immediately seized by the desire to rescue her and thus to reassert his morality. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference in the portrayal of the two girl figures. *Schindler's List* presents the girl in the red coat as an embodiment of innocence, thereby investing in her figure a considerable degree of sentimentality. Seemingly unaware of the atrocities occurring around her, the girl wanders through the liquidation of the ghetto, remaining almost miraculously untouched (a hope which is disappointed when Schindler recognises her body in a later scene). Simultaneously, the red colour of her coat offers the spectator a visual refuge from the panorama of violence mediated through the eyes of Schindler. By contrast, in *The Grey Zone*, the girl undergoes an existential loss of innocence, on the one hand by experiencing the gassing, and on the other by being confronted with the ethical predicament of the *Sonderkommando*. She thus becomes both a victim of and a witness to the mass murder of humans and the destruction of humanity in the death camps. The effort undertaken by Nelson to provide a different image of Jewish victimhood thus entails the radical disenchantment of childhood innocence.

Nelson contradicts the notion of a homogenous Jewish victim group by presenting the ethical dilemma of the *Sonderkommando* as a profound social conflict which arises among the commando members as well as in their encounter with the Jewish deportees destined to be gassed. The *mise-en-scène* of this conflict illustrates how Nelson draws upon narrative

patterns of popular film genres to create a different image of the Jewish Holocaust victim. Thus, the explicit language and aggressive bodily behaviour of the *Sonderkommando* members are reminiscent of the urban resistance film and indeed American gangster films of the '90s. On the one hand, the *Sonderkommando* members themselves, instead of being characterised by unifying solidarity, show different attitudes towards their own fate, that of the girl, and the revolt. While Rosenthal and Schlermer, for instance, see the purpose of the uprising in destroying the crematoria, thus striving for moral compensation, Abramowics views the extermination process with cynicism and hopes to escape during the revolt. The egoism, mistrust and resentment between the inmates culminate in Rosenthal's bitter remark to Schlermer: 'Do you trust Jews anymore?' (Nelson 2003: 40). The subversive impetus of this comment becomes apparent when compared with the narrative of a film like *Escape From Sobibor* (Gold 1987), in which the predominantly Jewish inmates form homogenous resistance against their oppressors. While in Gold's film, the resistance fighters explicitly agree that every inmate should be given a fair chance of survival, Nelson's film offers no such moral consensus.

On the other hand, *The Grey Zone* illustrates the moral dilemma of the *Sonderkommando* members through their confrontation with the Jewish deportees. In one of the film's central scenes set in the crematorium building's underground undressing room, Hoffman kills a deportee who blames him for his complicity with mass murder. At first, the deportee presses Hoffman to admit his participation in the perfidious strategy of the SS to conceal the imminent gassing as a shower: 'Tell me, you fucking Nazi, tell me I am going to live' (Nelson 2003: 48). To regain control over the situation and to silence the deportee, Hoffman consequently forces him to deliver his watch and attacks the deportee as he refuses to surrender to his claim. In psychological terms, the disturbing brutality with which Hoffman strikes dead the deportee before the eyes of his wife seems to express his self-hatred resulting out of feelings of guilt and shame. With regard to the film's scenic composition, it is remarkable how Hoffman's outbreak of violence is highlighted by constantly changing points of view. By alternating between the perspectives of Hoffman, the girl, the deportee's wife, and the SS guard, the scene evades a direct confrontation of Jews and National Socialists which would confirm the prevailing dichotomy of perpetrators and victims. Instead, it draws the spectator's attention to the forced involvement of the *Sonderkommando* members in the power structures of the extermination camps.

Hoffman, whose character is loosely based on the *Sonderkommando* member Salmen Lewental (Bezwinska/Czech 1992: 130–78), represents the guiding figure of *The Grey Zone*. His particular role is demonstrated already in the film's very first shot, an intimate frontal view of Hoffman's face as he is apparently immersed in thought. As a *pars pro toto*, Hoffman's profile appears to stand for his existence as a human being, thus visualising the film's structure of meaning as taking the predicament of the *Sonderkommando* as a model for a reflection on the human condition. The shot might also be interpreted as an *ecce homo*, a motif which anticipates questions of guilt and shame which are subsequently brought up in the

film. Hoffman's bodily appearance and behaviour in the first scenes of *The Grey Zone*, the anxiety and consternation they express, illustrate that his character is designed to undermine heroic convention. At the same time, he represents the film's central character, who in the course of its plot undergoes a profound change in his attitude towards life and death, thus leading the spectator to the basic insight which – according to Nelson – the predicament of the *Sonderkommando* holds for us. As Hoffman reveals to the girl in the confessional scene later in the film: 'How can you know what you'd do to stay alive until you're really asked? I know this now: for most of us, the answer is anything' (Nelson 2003: 157). The last resort in the ethical dilemma faced by the *Sonderkommando* is conceived to be suicide: 'You can kill yourself. That's the only choice' (99).

To involve the spectator in this 'most impossible bargain humanity could propose to itself', Nelson bestows *The Grey Zone* with a 'hard realism' (2003: 141) which is designed to create an effect of immediacy: 'This film must feel for the audience as if it is happening now' (163/64). Nelson holds that his film thereby distinguished itself from the majority of Holocaust films, which through their conventional dramaturgy presented the events as belonging to a distant past. Among the most important devices which Nelson employs to evoke an impression of realism and immediacy is the handheld camera. For instance, the extremely long shots which lead through the crematorium building, while being reminiscent of documentary film style, effectively mediate the narrowness of the surroundings and generate an atmosphere of claustrophobia and disorientation. Furthermore, they induce a hectic dynamic which corresponds to the gruelling work inside the crematorium and the inner trepidation of the *Sonderkommando* members. By consciously limiting these scenes to the witnessing perspective, Nelson achieves an effect of alienation, thus showing us a place that has been represented so often as though we were seeing it for the first time. Another device applied for the effect of realism and immediacy is the subjective camera, a technique which reaches its culmination at the film's end, when the spectator is placed into the perspective of the girl and – in both senses – shot. The unsteady images created by handheld and subjective camera are balanced by sometimes extraordinarily long shots whose resemblance to pictures is reinforced by their minimalist composition. These intensely aestheticised long shots urge the spectator to meditate upon the predicament of the *Sonderkommando* members, as in the scene which shows Schlermer in front of the undressing room, as he waits for his shift to 'clean' the gas chamber to begin. The remarkably slow frontal tracking shot towards Schlermer's face, which is half covered by darkness, does not merely evoke his particular inner state, but represents another *ecce homo*, a reflection on the human condition amidst barbarity. While the naked bodies of the murdered are not shown at this stage, the spectator is led to imagine their fate through the permanent humming of the extraction fan inside the gas chamber, a sound device which – as so often in Nelson's film – functions as a surrogate stimulus for the non-represented.

While Nelson's strategy of realism might help to avoid the emotionalising of the historical events which characterises melodrama, the emphasis it places on the impression of authenticity at the same time counteracts a

rational approach to them. In order to achieve its realist effect, the film largely conceals the fact that its account of the *Sonderkommando* revolt is in fact a highly selective construction. Moreover, Nelson does not seem as consistent in the realist *mise-en-scène* of his film as he suggests. Thus, the realism of the handheld camera is repeatedly contrasted by an almost transcendental perspective on the events, as, for instance, in the film's epilogue following Muhsfeldt's shooting of the girl. Its scenes are characterised by slow motion and a low-contrast, pastel-like colour design. At this point, Nelson obviously substitutes his demand for realism and immediacy in favour of what might be called a poetic depiction. The transcendental point of view of the epilogue is achieved through the girl's off screen voice, which in the manner of a *prosopopoeia* ('voice from beyond the grave') provides an actually impossible testimony of the burning of her own corpse and the 'work' of the new commando:

> I catch fire quickly. The first part of me rises in dense smoke that mingles with the smoke of others. Then there are the bones, which settle in ash, and these are swept up to be carried to the river, and last . . . bits of our dust, that simply float there in air around the working of the new group. These bits of dust are grey. We settle on their shoes and on their faces, and in their lungs, and they become so used to us that soon they don't cough, and they don't brush us away. At this point, they are just moving, like anyone else still alive in that place. And this is how the work continues.
>
> (Nelson 2003: 129/30)

The actions inside the crematorium are here aesthetically transformed at the expense of the film's realism. In addition to the girl's transcendental perspective, this is brought about by the transfiguration of the ashes from the relics of murdered humans to an ethereal element as well as by the dedramatisation of the 'work' carried out by the *Sonderkommando* to mere movements. The epilogue thus constitutes a fracture of the film's dramaturgy to represent the predicament of the *Sonderkommando* 'without overt stylisations', in 'cold' and 'brutal' mode (146, 163/64), and it simultaneously fails to add an element of self-reflexivity to the film's narrative structure.

Visual designs

In terms of the film's iconography, Nelson's aim to portray the role of the *Sonderkommando* in the 'Final Solution' and his commitment to realism result in a depiction of the extermination process that transgresses established ethical boundaries. This explicitness is furthermore due to Nelson's intention to establish an iconography of the extermination process more or less unprecedented on historical and artistic levels. To achieve this end, Nelson innovates the standard iconography of Holocaust films while at the same time creating continuity through the citation of visual signs which are already established in cultural memory. The most obvious of these traditional elements is the child as a symbol for moral purity and its murder as a symbol for a life not lived (Amishai-Mailsels 1993: 143). Moreover, the arrival of the deportation train at Auschwitz-Birkenau is depicted with

the aid of iconic images, such as the opening of the wagon from the deportees' inside point of view which is followed by the glaring spotlights at the ramp of the Lager. Finally, *The Grey Zone* reproduces iconic images such as the volcanic chimneys of the crematorium and the murdered deportees' relics, their hair, their shoes and their watches. In the following, I intend to discuss three elements of the film's imagery which represent an innovation in relation to the iconographic traditions of Holocaust memory: the crematorium as a factory, the human body as the object of historical violence, and the gas chamber as the limit of representation.

The Grey Zone depicts the crematorium building as a factory, in which both the SS and the *Sonderkommando* perform their abysmal 'work'. Nelson thus refers again to Levi, who in 'The Grey Zone' terms Auschwitz-Birkenau 'a big industrial factory' (1988: 26). In a dramaturgically motivated succession of events, the film re-enacts every stage of the extermination process. It thus draws increasingly close to the mass murder inside the gas chambers, which has been conceived as the ethical limit of artistic representation, most emphatically by Claude Lanzmann, who demanded a 'Bilderverbot' ('prohibition on images') for this central 'scene' of the Holocaust (LaCapra 1997: 236). The camera's progressive invasion into the centre of extermination thereby creates enormous suspense. At the same time, the scenes inside the gas chamber and the furnace room are frequently characterised by a calm and steady cinematography which again resembles photographic images. Instead of placing the spectator in a state of consternation, *The Grey Zone* thus provides a rather rational and indeed analytical view of the extermination process. Furthermore, the scenes' photographic character appears designed to inscribe them as deeply as possible into the spectator's memory, as still images exercise a more lasting effect upon human perception than moving ones and thus function as building blocks of remembering (Zelizer 1998: 2; Sontag 2003: 19). Nelson utilises this characteristic of still images to imprint his vision of the Lager into the spectator's memory and thereby to integrate them into the archive of iconic images upon which cultural representations of the Holocaust are based.

Finally, Nelson's representation of the crematorium as a factory refers to contemporary interpretations of the relation between Holocaust and modernity. While National Socialism appears in many respects as an anti-modernist movement, as is illustrated, for instance, by the traditional notion of the role of women or the suppression of social pluralism, the systematic persecution of the Jews, in particular, exhibits a rationality which is characteristic of modern societies. In this sense, Omer Bartov has pointed out that the 'Final Solution' in its organisation and execution corresponded to the Germany's status as a modern industrial state with distinctive economic and bureaucratic structures (2000: 167). It might thus be no exaggeration to assert that in this respect, *The Grey Zone* does provide an essential insight into the nature of National Socialist extermination policy.

Body images

An iconic feature of *The Grey Zone* which contrasts with the industrial character of mass extermination consists in the manifold *mise-en-scène* of

corporeality. Nelson highlights some of the fundamental forms of violence which prevailed in the extermination camps by focussing upon the human body as the object of that violence. His film thus illustrates how representations of the human body contribute to the archiving and mediation of collective knowledge about the Holocaust. In describing this process, it is crucial to note that the images which Holocaust films, for instance, present of perpetrators and victims do not reflect any kind of neutral corporeality, but always aim at a certain gesture of remembering. Representations of the human body express certain moral concepts and thus help to determine the significance which in contemporary society is given to the historical events represented. The filmic body can thus be said to function in the manner of a projection screen, upon which knowledge about the Holocaust is displayed in visual signs (Ohlschläger/Wiens 1996: 9–22). The particularity of the filmic body is that in conveying collective knowledge, it offers the spectator a somatic experience of the represented and moreover allows for individual identification (Zahlmann 2001: 20/21).

Nelson's *The Grey Zone* describes the basic power structures which were active in the National Socialist extermination camps as the unlimited power of the SS over the inmates' bodies (Sofsky 1997: 27–40). This is achieved, on the one hand, through the systematic depiction of the extermination process, which illustrates the absolute power of the SS to deprive the inmates not only of their lives, but also of their individual deaths and, in the later stages of the 'Final Solution', to almost completely destroy their bodies. This is demonstrated, for instance, in the scene when the deportees descend into the underground undressing room in a long row, while their collective death as well as the annihilation of their bodies is anticipated by a crane shot showing the smoking chimneys of the crematorium. Also the abovementioned scenes inside the furnace room visualise the annulment of individual corporeality, as they present the murdered as a mass of bodies to be exploited and destroyed.

On the other hand, *The Grey Zone* depicts how in the camps power was exercised upon the human body by means of torture. The fact that torture was an indispensable means for National Socialists to enforce their claim for power has probably been described most hauntingly by Jean Améry (1999: 21–40). In his view, the maltreatment which the torturer performs upon his victim not only aims at injuring his body. Instead, the actual purpose of torture is to let the tortured experience being completely at the mercy of his tormentor and to thus destroy his inner resistance, his personality and his 'trust in the world' (28). An analytical description of the exercise of power through torture has been undertaken by Elaine Scarry, who suggests that in the act of torture two fundamental institutions of civil society are inverted into their opposite and turned against the tortured. First, torture represents the inversion of law, a reversal of the relation between cause and effect which operates in a trial. While in a trial evidence is gathered which under certain circumstances leads to a certain form of punishment, torture is the exercise of unconditional punishment with the aim of creating a certain kind of evidence. Second, torture is to be understood as the inversion of medicine, as its methods aim not at curing, but at harming the body of the tortured, often in the most subtle ways (1985: 41/42).

In its depiction of the torture inflicted on the three female camp inmates who were involved in the preparation of the *Sonderkommando* revolt, *The Grey Zone* emphasises exactly these two aspects, which, as Scarry remarks, were most radically inverted into their opposites in the National Socialist camps (1985: 41). The inversion of law becomes apparent in the argument between the two interrogators as to whether the origin or the destination of the powder was to be ascertained, as it shows torture to be an arbitrary means for the creation of evidence. Moreover, the scene is revealing insofar as the act of torture is assigned to two other characters who do not partake in the questioning. These figures – who, interestingly, are dressed in white gowns – illustrate the presence of medicine in the act of torture by executing the physical punishment, the pulling out of the fingernails, and by reviving the tortured for a continuation of that punishment. Thus, *The Grey Zone* demonstrates also with regard to torture how in the National Socialist camp system the human body was degraded into the object of a particular form of structural violence.

The mise-en-scène of violence upon the human body inevitably poses the problem of how to avoid a voyeuristic satisfaction on the part of the spectator, what Adorno once called 'heinous affirmation' (1991: 88). This problem becomes even more complex with regard to representations of naked bodies, which have formed a part of visual Holocaust memory since the early post-war period. Such images seem to be an especially delicate issue as the sight of the naked victims originally expressed the perpetrators' perspective as well as the rationality of 'Final Solution'. As Raul Hilberg has shown, the stripping of the deportees in the extermination camps served to conduct their murder and the successive exploitation and cremation of their bodies in most efficient terms (1985: 967–79). This historical context may help to explain why the representation of Holocaust victims as nudes is frequently perceived as degrading and obscene. By contrast, in the case of Roberto Benigni's film *La vita è bella*, for instance, much criticism was directed against the representation of the victims' naked bodies for remaining, like the depiction of the camp in general, 'shrouded in fantasy' (Gordon 2005: 38). In fact, the pile of corpses which the protagonist Guido discovers towards the end of the film, in an often discussed scene, is transfigured and stylized, constituting an almost Dantesque scenario. Thus, depictions of the naked bodies of Holocaust victims not only entail the danger of voyeurism, but also the imperative to adequately confront the spectator with the reality of mass destruction in the camps.

In the face of these ethical difficulties it appears particularly interesting that filmic representations of the Holocaust show a tendency towards an increasing sexualisation above all of the naked female body (Kramer 2001: 234). To name only the two most prominent examples, while in Chomsky's *Holocaust*, the mise-en-scène of the female body is still relatively sterile, it assumes erotic connotations in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993). When in *Holocaust* the female inmates are forced to undress and are driven into the gas chamber, their genitals remain covered while the spectator's gaze upon their bare bodies is distanced by means of a static cinematography.

By contrast, *Schindler's List* shows an ambivalent representation of nudity. On the one hand, the film exposes the enfeebled bodies of the camp inmates with the aim of arousing the spectator's abhorrence towards the crimes which were committed upon their bodies. Thus, the mise-en-scène of the selection in the Plaszów labour camp appeals to the spectator's memory of the iconic images taken by the Allied troops during the liberation of the camps Dachau and Bergen-Belsen in 1945 (Brink 2000: 135–50; Knoch 2001: 917/18). On the other, the film undertakes an eroticisation of the female inmates' bodies to facilitate the spectator's empathy, as, for instance, in the notorious scene of the women's imminent gassing. Through a mise-en-scène that alternates between a voyeuristic perspective upon their naked bodies and a perspective that almost places us among the victims, the scene incites on the part of the spectator feelings of arousal and identification which help to dramatize the threat of their impending destruction (Kramer 1999: 10; Horowitz 1997: 120).

The Grey Zone differs from these films as it predominantly depicts the naked dead bodies of those deportees who were murdered with poison gas immediately after their arrival in the camps. These bodies are not haggard, like those displayed by the iconic images of the liberated camps, but are characterised by rather normal shapes. The depiction of naked dead bodies complicates the ethics of representation even further, as their sight challenges the spectator's relation to sexuality and death, those two aspects of human life which are most heavily subject to social taboo. Moreover, images of sexuality and death stand in a complex ethical relation to each other, as is illustrated by the demand that representations of naked dead bodies are only acceptable under the exclusion of sexual connotations. A film like *The Grey Zone* therefore faces the dramaturgic problem of how to represent the bare bodies of the victims in a way that allows for the spectator's empathy, while at the same time excluding any voyeuristic pleasure in horror.

Nelson approaches this problem through a *mise-en-scène* which exhibits an ambiguity of attraction and repulsion, thus resembling the devices used by Spielberg in *Schindler's List*. While the sensuous and indeed erotically charged images of the girl's body appear designed to enable the spectator to commiserate with her fate, the depiction of the dead bodies' impious treatment in the gas chamber and in the furnace room appeal to the spectator's disgust towards the atrocities inflicted upon the deportees. Though it might seem provocative that in *The Grey Zone*, the object of eroticisation is the girl, whose first vision resembles a pose of sleep and highlights her shining moist skin, Nelson thus avoids the aforesaid taboo of eroticising dead bodies. Furthermore, this *mise-en-scène* corresponds with the film's narrative strategy to present the girl from the perspective of the *Sonderkommando* members as the embodiment of the moral compensation they are longing for. In fact, the eroticised depiction of the girl occurs exactly at that point of the narrative when Hoffman for the first time senses the desire to save her. Finally, the – comparatively cautious – eroticisation of the girl's naked body helps enable the spectator to relate also in emotional terms to the aspiration of the *Sonderkommando* members to reclaim their humanity.

Limit zones

The ethical question as to whether the mass murder inside the gas chambers can or should be represented through film has repeatedly been the subject of controversial debate. While the intensity of these debates, which were frequently sparked off by films that transgressed established boundaries of representation, has decreased, the aesthetic strategies in dealing with that central moment of the Holocaust continue to evolve, especially in film. In order to characterize the strategy which Nelson employs in *The Grey Zone*, I will briefly compare the film to its two most influential predecessors, *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List*. In *Holocaust*, Chomsky renounces a direct filmic depiction of the death inside the gas chambers, and instead provides a verbal description of a gassing from the perspective of the perpetrators. This occurs in the scene when the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, demonstrates the efficiency of the extermination process to the inspector Professor Pfannenstiel as an anonymous group of victims is gassed. The perpetrators cast a voyeuristic gaze through the gas chamber's door viewer and encourage the spectator to imagine the horror of the gassing by comparing it to 'Dante's Inferno' and 'the moaning inside a synagogue'. Ultimately, the agonising death inside the gas chambers is trivialized through these metaphoric transfigurations (Köppen 1997: 145–70).

An intensely discussed scene which is on the brink of depicting what has been termed the 'unrepresentable' is the one inside the delousing barrack in Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.[3] While using the spectator's knowledge, according to which Auschwitz-Birkenau is equivalent with extermination, to present the entrance of the women into the delousing barrack as an imminent gassing, the scene simultaneously adheres to the 'Bilderverbot', as the gassing turns out to be a disinfection. Moreover, the scene combines the perspectives of perpetrators and victims. Thus, the camera transfers the spectator from the point of view of the victims running into the shower room into that of a voyeuristic witness by stopping in front of the door and pausing at the door viewer. Finally, the camera once again approaches the perspective of the victims, as it shows the women from inside the chamber trembling with fear, until their tension resolves as the water starts running from the shower heads. Through this repeated change of perspective, *Schindler's List* reveals the voyeurism of the perpetrator's perspective. By simultaneously stimulating and disappointing the spectator's expectation that the scene led to a gassing, the film moreover reflects the problem of how to represent the victim's experiences in the medium of film and ultimately respects the death inside the gas chamber as the limit of mimetic representation.

In *The Grey Zone*, the depiction of the extermination process is divided into two parts, the first of which displays a group of Hungarian Jews being forced into the gas chamber. Similarly to *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List*, the camera is thereby situated among the victims, and the scene's immediacy is reinforced by being filmed from the girl's point of view. However, in contrast to Spielberg, Nelson abstains from confronting the perspective of the victims with that of the perpetrators, and instead highlights the role of the *Sonderkommando*. After its members are shown to slam the doors of the gas chamber – an action for which there is no historical evidence – the

3 For a detailed analysis of this scene see Kramer 1999: 9–16.

camera focuses on Hoffman seized with guilt in the empty undressing room. At this stage, the excruciating death inside the gas chamber is still not visualised, but mediated acoustically through the screaming of the deportees. The representation of the 'unrepresentable' occurs after the reviving of the girl, in a flashback which presents from a lateral perspective how inside the gas chamber, mother, child and other deportees fall to the ground. Interestingly, Nelson seeks to mitigate this violation of the 'Bilderverbot' in various ways. Thus, the shot's brevity provides the spectator with only an elusive impression of the event, and its *mise-en-scène* diverges from the film's overall realism by means of its slow motion and its low-contrast, pale colouring. Finally, the scene's reference remains unclear, as, for example, it could depict the girl's blurred memory of the gassing or the imagination of the *Sonderkommando* members who seek to explain her survival. In any case, by creating an aesthetical surrogate even for this most intimate 'scene' of the Holocaust, Nelson pursues the aim of reinforcing the event's continuing relevance for cultural memory.

This intention also appears to stand behind Nelson's endeavour to attribute a universal ethical dimension to the predicament of the *Sonderkommando*s. Through the construction of an ethical message, which he conceives as possessing an enduring significance for humanity, Nelson attempts to ingrain Holocaust memory in social discourse in an innovative and lasting fashion. This strategy is comprehensible as a reaction to the ongoing transformation of Holocaust memory, which as the last generation of witnesses passes away, relies almost exclusively on documented biographies, historical accounts and cultural artefacts. The important role of films in this process of transition is illustrated by the steady increase in Holocaust-films during the '80s and especially the '90s, which constituted a reaction to the foreseeable loss of original testimony. However, Spielberg still succeeded in connecting fiction with testimony by uniting, in the modern-day epilogue to *Schindler's List*, the actors of his film with the last 'Schindlerjuden' still alive. For a director of the following generation like Nelson, the invocation of such 'pathos of the primary' (Köppen/Scherpe 1997: 2) has become almost impossible. Instead, his film demonstrates the necessity to attribute a metahistorical meaning to the Holocaust which might serve as a link to the spectator's horizon of knowledge and experience. By establishing a relation between the 'work' of the *Sonderkommandos* and what he regards as basic questions of human morality, Nelson transforms the individual fates of the *Sonderkommando* members into a collective historical heritage. In this respect, Nelson's film is part of a more general trend to universalise the legacy of the Holocaust (Levy/Sznaider 2001: 9). This tendency, which over the last decade has affected the politics of memory and artistic representations alike, should urge us to reflect on how and to what effect the Holocaust is being reinterpreted and recontextualised.

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Dead Man Walking: The Aldo Moro kidnap and Palimpsest History in *Buongiorno, notte*

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Abstract

The centrist Italian politician Aldo Moro was kidnapped in 1978 and murdered 54 days later by the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades) – a far-left revolutionary group. The kidnap has come to be perceived as the key event of the Italian 'terrorist' period of roughly 1969–1983, and has displaced the other events of the period in national memory. There are several films devoted to the kidnapping; Buongiorno, notte (2003), based on the memoir by one of Moro's jailers, is unique among these in evincing a sophisticated awareness of the means by which historical understanding is constructed through a clash and superimposition of discourses, including various forms of fictional representation. The film is a meditation not solely on the Moro events in themselves, but on the place of the memory of Aldo Moro in Italian culture, and on the means by which the perception and historicising of the Moro kidnapping is generated.

Keywords

Aldo Moro
terrorism
anni di piombo
Good Morning, Night
collective memory
traumatic history

Introduction

Aldo Moro, the president of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats, hereafter DC), a conservative party then the largest party in Italy, had been prime minister no less then five times when he was kidnapped on 16 March 1978. Moro was kidnapped by the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades, hereafter BR), a small but well-organised far-left clandestine armed group, and his five bodyguards were gunned down. After a protracted period of incarceration (54 days), Moro was himself murdered.

Throughout the period of the kidnap, the government DC and the communist opposition party, the Partito Comunista Italiano (hereafter PCI), both refused to negotiate with the BR for Moro's life, insisting on reasons of state for their hard-line stance. Moro himself, from his prison, wrote many letters arguing the case for negotiation; his former colleagues denounced his position and even doubted his sanity, suggesting that he had been drugged or was the victim of the Stockholm syndrome, when a hostage comes to sympathise with his captors. Many since have berated the Italian state for its demolition of Moro's reputation as well as for its refusal to negotiate with Moro's kidnappers, and many continue to suspect the motives of the individuals in power. The literature on the kidnapping is voluminous and continues to grow. It includes memoir, fiction, judicial and parliamentary investigation, as well as conventional historiography. Whatever the genre, much of this literature is written in the mode of the

misteri d'Italia (Italian mysteries) and in the vein of *dietrologia*, or conspiracy theory. Some have claimed that Moro was allowed to die for tactical reasons by his rivals in the DC; others have claimed that the BR were infiltrated by the Italian secret services or even by the CIA, and that the kidnap was orchestrated as a Cold War action intended to keep the PCI – the largest communist party in the capitalist world – away from government. Many continue to insist that we do not know the full facts or truth of Moro's abduction, imprisonment and murder.[1]

It is in part this uncertainty that has allowed the explicitly fictional, and an entertainment medium like the cinema to assume such importance in the interpretation of the Moro events. When the full facts are perceived to be elusive, fictional means can step in to fill the interpretive breach, to articulate a truth that is felt or assumed rather then definitively known. Whatever the whole truth of the Moro kidnapping and the reasons behind it, it is fair to say that Aldo Moro has not gone away: he continues to haunt the cultural psyche of the Italian nation.[2] This is one of the meanings of the disconcerting and moving scene towards the end of the film *Buongiorno, notte* (*Good Morning, Night*, Marco Bellocchio 2003) when Moro walks free at dawn, as of course he never did, from his BR prison in Via Montalcini, Rome: his ghost is still at large, in Rome, in Italy.[3]

Buongiorno, notte is loosely based on a memoir by one of Moro's BR jailers, Anna Laura Braghetti (Braghetti and Tavella, 2003), and narrates the experience of the kidnap from the point of view of a fictional female BR member, Chiara. The film has been ambivalently received as at once too sympathetic to the 'terrorists' and as being patronising towards them. It could be argued that the character of Chiara is reduced (from Braghetti's self-portrayal in her memoir) to a reactive 'maternal' role and she seems to lack any articulated political motivation for her actions.[4] For Ruth Glynn (forthcoming), Bellocchio wrests from Braghetti 'the maturity and responsibility she takes for her actions [in her memoir], and [denies] her the status of conscious speaking subject. Thus the female terrorist is portrayed without any subject position of her own; she is merely is an object onto whom various ideologies – and even a new identity [that of Chiara] – are projected'. Be that as it may, in this essay I am less concerned with an analysis of the film from either a gender or a narrowly political perspective, and more with the sense in the film that *Buongiorno, notte* knows itself to be a work that has come 'late': it evinces an awareness of how the Moro case has been represented in the past, and is a kind of reflexive palimpsest.

My argument here is that the film is less a text about the Moro events as such, than a reflection upon the means by which such events come to be constructed, represented and understood. In the remainder of this article I will give what I suspect is a necessary account of the forms of terrorism in Italy as well as of the place and status of the Moro kidnapping in Italian national memory, and I will then discuss the means by which *Buongiorno, notte* acknowledges its contingent and self-reflexive character.

The Moro kidnap and terrorisms in Italy

Terrorism, however we define such a contentious term, has a proud history in Italy: it has been employed in the service of the state as well as

1 The chief conspiracy theorist of the Moro kidnapping is Sergio Flamigni: a former senator, member of the Italian parliament, and author of several conspiracy books on the Moro kidnapping (see for example, Flamigni 1993, 1998), he was also a member of the Italian parliamentary enquiry into the Moro kidnap. See Bartali (2006) for a brief account, informed in large part by Flamigni's work, of the contradictory facts, strange coincidences and ambiguous episodes that have licensed the conspiracy theories of the Moro kidnapping. In particular, note Bartali's frank admission that the various speculations fail to add up to a coherent account: 'Theories, deductions, suppositions. A single truth emerges clearly: there are no certainties. Clues indicate a precise path; however, there is not sufficient evidence to definitely confirm a hypothesis' (p. 155). See also Drake (2006) for a sceptical assessment of the origin and proliferation of conspiracy theories of the Moro kidnap and 'their multifaceted appeal to the Italian imagination' (p. 115).

2 This 'haunting' has perhaps been facilitated by the fact that Moro, once a powerful figure, has left no legacy in Italian political life. As David Moss has argued, well before the dissolution of the

against it, and has been the expression of a variety of ideologies, moderate as well as extremist.[5] Italian history suggests the truth of Walter Laqueur's assertion that 'there is no terrorism per se, except perhaps on an abstract level, but different terrorisms' (1987: 9). If there is little point in trying to characterise terrorism by its ideologies, we can, however, suggest a typology which identifies two main types of terrorism according to how the targets of violence are chosen.

> The first is random or arbitrary targeting, by aiming terrorist actions at whoever is present when the attack is launched. The typical example is the bomb in a crowded city centre, an airport or railway station. In such cases, terrorists are seeking to take advantage of the effect created by the infliction of death and injury upon a random selection of people. [. . .] Secondly, targets of violence may be selected for their symbolic or representative value. Terrorists are then directing violence against people they consider representatives of the enemy they want to take on. In such cases of terrorism, violence will approach liquidation, but the victims of violence are nevertheless chosen mainly for their symbolic value. It is important to stress that the targets of violence selected in this way have only a peripheral role in the struggle against the terrorists. They represent the enemy because of their political or social status, because of their positions in politics, business or the state apparatus, or membership in a social or cultural group. Victims are not chosen so selectively that those actually hit by violence could not have been substituted with other members of the same category of people (Engene 2004: 13; see also Schmid and Jungman 1988: 7–10).

These two types of target selection correspond to the main forms of terrorist violence practiced by right and left during the Italian *anni di piombo* (years of lead), the period roughly from 1969 to 1983 when intra-national, ideologically motivated violence was a persistent feature of Italian society, especially in Rome and the industrial cities of northern Italy.[6]

The second type of target selection corresponds to the *modus operandi* of militant left-wing groups like the BR, groups for the most part guilty of targeted assassinations, kneecappings, robbery and kidnapping, actions carried out in an attempt to foment revolution and hasten the advent of a communist state.

The first type, on the other hand, corresponds to the large-scale, indiscriminate bombing, or *stragismo* (literally, 'massacre-ism'), of the far right. *Stragismo* was linked to the *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension), which, narrowly defined, was implemented between 1969 and 1974 as part of a campaign to establish a presidential or quasi-authoritarian type of political system in Italy (the intention was to throw the state into a law-and-order crisis that would make a take-over by the military or the far right seem desirable). *Stragismo* refers to the more autonomous use of indiscriminate massacre by neo-fascist groups which enjoyed the protection of the intelligence services, and which continued well beyond 1974, reaching its horrific apotheosis with the Bologna train station bombing in August 1980, in which 85 people died and 200 were injured.[7]

Right-wing terrorism was far more devastating, in terms of number of victims, than that practised by the left. Extrapolating from figures collected

DC in the mid-1990s, the section of the party associated with Moro was itself effectively dissolved. (Moss made these points in a paper entitled 'Captain Cook and Aldo Moro: The Choreography of Violent Death and its Interpretive Aftermath', presented at the conference 'Remembering Moro', 10–11 November 2006, IGRS, London.)

3 The presence of Moro in the Italian cultural psyche is something that can be deduced more broadly from the number of films that have been devoted to the Moro kidnapping. Thus far, there have been at least six, plus one American film, along with an unreleased trilogy and a forthcoming television miniseries. Apart from *Buongiorno, notte*, these are:

Kleinhoff Hotel (Carlo Lizzani 1977). A curiosity, in that while it was produced *before* the kidnapping, in its dubbed English version it contains an extended reference (in voiceover) to the Moro events. The film is a kind of *Last Tango* in Berlin in which a young woman stranded in a shabby hotel has torrid sex with the suicidal terrorist next door.

Ogro (*Operation Ogre*, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1980). A text ostensibly about the assassination by ETA of Admiral Carrero Blanco in Madrid in 1973. The film, long in development, was adapted by Pontecorvo and his

by della Porta, Tardi (2005: 15) has calculated that 56 per cent of terrorist incidents, 60 per cent of deaths and 75 per cent of injuries between 1969 and 1982 were the result of right-wing terrorism. It is nonetheless the case that the majority of the films dealing with the experience or legacies of the *anni di piombo*, a corpus of dozens of films, focus on the terrorism of the left.[8] The reasons why this should be so are complex (see O'Leary 2007: 45–47). One reason is certainly that political commitment in filmmaking was associated with the left in Italy, as elsewhere, during the latter half of the twentieth century. Left-wing terrorism represented a particularly fraught issue for politically committed Italian filmmakers, as for their audience, and such filmmakers have often taken upon themselves the responsibility of articulating the meaning of this form of politically motivated violence practiced by members of their constituency. As Catanzaro writes:

> Part of the tradition of the left-wing is its problematic or traumatic relationship with violence. This is in strong contrast to the extreme right-wing, which conceives of society as being governed by violence; [the extreme right] does not propose to change this state of affairs but rather take it to the extreme. Traditionally, the revolutionary left, in both its successes and failures, has often faced the problem of reconciling the use of violence with the blueprint of a self-regulating and violence-free society. We can in fact argue that the real problem of the historical experiences of the revolutionary left in the twentieth century has been its relationship to violence.
>
> Catanzaro 1991: 175

Following Catanzaro's argument, it would appear inevitable that left-wing filmmakers should attempt to interrogate the legitimacy and understand the consequences of politically motivated violence emerging from within groups close to their own political position. Bellocchio's *Buongiorno, notte* is clearly part of this tradition of filmmaking.

From another point of view, one could suggest that filmmakers (and collective memory itself) have been the victims of the BR's skill at self-publicity, as well as of the essentially mysterious nature of *stragismo*. The Red Brigades were the largest, best-organised and longest-surviving of the left-wing terrorist groups; they practiced an effective demagogic politics, using a memorable symbol, catchy slogans and astute news manipulation to advertise their objectives and actions. To some extent, this paraphernalia has proven attractive to filmmakers: the title of Gianni Amelio's *Colpire al cuore* (*Blow to the Heart*, 1982) marries two BR slogans to ironic effect (*colpirne uno per educarne cento*, strike one to teach one hundred; *portare l'attacco al cuore dello stato*, take the attack to the heart of the state), and Bellocchio makes droll play with a blood-red BR star painted on an elevator interior in *Buongiorno, notte*. Perhaps the sole equivalent icon of right-wing terrorism is the clock paused at 10.25 in Bologna station, indicating the time of the station bombing on 2 August 1980. It is significant, however, that the stalled clock-face is the mysterious index of an event rather than the chosen symbol of an organisation: the perpetrators of the explosion elected to remain anonymous. This anonymity, and the

scriptwriters following the Moro murder, and was received in Italy as unambiguously referring to the kidnap.

Maledetti vi amerò (*To Love the Damned*, Marco Tullio Giordana, 1980): The first film, about a disillusioned former revolutionary, by the director of the well-received *La meglio gioventù* (*The Best of Youth*, 2003), presents both Pier Paolo Pasolini (the filmmaker and writer) and Aldo Moro as murdered fathers of a bereaved left. The assassination of Moro is therefore represented as a form of parricide, an interpretation reprised in *Buongiorno, notte*.

Il caso Moro (*The Moro Affair*, Giuseppe Ferrara, 1986): A conspiracy docudrama based on an investigative book by American Robert Katz, which presents national history as thriller, a common trope in Italian culture. What distinguishes this film from all the others is the central place given to the Moro character himself, played with weary humanity by the cult left-wing actor Gian-Maria Volonté as a font of resigned truth.

The Year of the Gun (John Frankenheimer 1991): An American thriller which exploits international familiarity with the Moro events and stars Sharon Stone as a photo-journalist investigating the BR. Less interesting for what it might say about the Moro kidnap than for what

apparently 'senseless' character of the massacre led, it could be argued, to the bombing being classed 'in the category of the "wrath of nature", much like an act of God or a freak of nature – here today, gone tomorrow – lacking any rhyme or reason' (Farnen 1990: 123). As such, it could only find a disputed place in the national memory,[9] and though a massive and monstrous event, the bombing was destined to disappear from newspapers, and certainly from the front pages and television news headlines, after just a few days. On the other hand, the very duration of the Moro kidnapping ensured that it remained on the front pages of the national press, and gained maximum attention for the kidnappers. As Farnen (1990: 117) writes:

> The BR regularly supplied enough news so that the Moro case remained an international media event for nearly two months. Through their selection of a prime target (Moro) in a prominent place (Rome), with a well-planned, bloody, and efficient initial event (kidnap and murder), the BR effectively achieved maximum effect and set the news agenda for fifty-four days. [. . .] Even the choice of killing on the spot or abducting Moro had its intended media impact, since a political martyr was worth far less press coverage than a captive hero pleading for his life.

The result was a black-out of nearly all other cultural, political and foreign news – and the impression was created of a 'nation held in check' (Zavoli 1992: 295). This mediated experience of the kidnapping (the first example of round-the-clock news reporting in the Italian context) partly accounts for the traumatic persistence of the memory of the Moro events in the Italian consciousness. However unfortunate one might find it, an extended and morbidly photogenic series of events, like the Moro kidnapping, is ultimately more memorable than the apparently inexplicable and arbitrary acts characteristic of right-wing terrorism.

At the same time, to take a broader perspective, terrorism in 1970s Italy has yet to receive a comprehensive historical overview. The Italian historian Guido Panvini (2007: 104–6) has lamented the fact that we await a wide-ranging work of historiography on the causes and contexts of the violence of the *anni di piombo*. In the absence of such a work, says Panvini, a fixation with spectacular events prevails; an obsessive and apparently insatiable desire for ascertaining the 'truth' of particularly salient events has taken precedence over the historical analysis of the social movements and processes that generated such events. Panvini gives the inevitable example of the Moro kidnapping as illustration of the phenomenon (p. 106). One could suggest that the Moro kidnapping has actually *displaced* the broader history of the period. The familiar, fetishised photographs of the incarcerated Moro, originally distributed by his jailers, and of his corpse discovered in the centre of Rome survive as metonyms for the conflicts of the *anni di piombo*, but such conflicts are themselves elided.[10] The murder of the politician has become a trope unhitched from its specific historical circumstances; it has become a screen memory which evokes the atmosphere of the *anni di piombo* while obscuring the politics, protests and mass mobilisations of the time.

it retrospectively reveals about U.S. Cold War attitudes to Italy.

Piazza delle Cinque Lune (*Piazza of the Five Moons*, Renzo Martinelli 2003): Made by the director as another in his series of spectacular episodes from Italy's murky history, this is a conspiracy film in the mode of *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991), with a dubbed Donald Sutherland in the role of investigating judge. It is also a 'postcard' film: 25% of the budget was put up by the *comune* of Siena and it opens with the famous horse race, the Palio. This is a 'tainted' heritage film showing an Italy both beautiful and corrupt and obviously designed for export.

A project by the filmmaker Aurelio Grimaldi, *Trilogia Aldo Moro*, was apparently left unfinished in 2004 and has never been released, but has nonetheless generated some discussion (Uva 2007: 73–4). A television miniseries called simply *Aldo Moro*, with Michele Placido in the title role, is currently in production by Taodue, a company that specialises in stories inspired by real events, including other terrorist episodes from Italy's recent history. The film will, apparently, be broadcast this year to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the kidnap.

See note eleven for the employment of the memory of the Moro kidnap in other films.

The relatively numerous films devoted to the Moro kidnap are symptomatic, both of the 'memorability' of the conduct of the kidnap itself and of the fact that the causes of politically motivated violence in this period of Italian history have yet to be properly elucidated.[11] However, my argument is that the frank contingency of the historical reconstruction performed in *Buongiorno, notte* distinguishes it in kind from the other films: while it does not fail to swell the 'myth' of the kidnap,[12] it nonetheless represents a critical engagement with that myth.

Moro's escape

I have already mentioned the new experience, for the Italian public, of intensive, round-the-clock, news reporting that marked the duration of the Moro kidnap:

> From the morning [of the kidnapping] radio and television provided non-stop transmissions, and newspapers issued special editions that drew Italians' attention to the extreme gravity of the act and to the potential consequences for political stability [. . .] but, at the same time, with the constant reproduction of the few images available and the scarcity of real news, this incessant repetition helped to feed the sense of disorientation and panic which affected everybody to some extent. [. . .] The situation was one of a frenetic piling-up of often purely speculative hypotheses, of voices, of unconfirmed revelation, and of self-serving rumour, all mixed up with the little that was known for sure.
>
> Murialdi 1995: 200/1

In our own era of twenty-four-hour news reporting this process has become very familiar, but the Moro kidnapping was the first example of the process at work in the Italian context. The reportage relied on a paradox: the victim and focus of the attention was invisible – Moro was an absence at the centre of the speculation and he was seen only by his jailers until discovered dead in the boot of a car on Via Caetani, 54 days after his kidnap. Thus, one of the functions of a film like *Buongiorno, notte,* is to put Moro 'back in the picture': to give concrete visual form to an incarceration that was so intensely imagined by press and public at the time.

The immense degree of attention devoted to the Moro kidnap during the 54 days is one of the reasons why his murder has come to seem of such central importance. Its significance, that is, was asserted by the very attention paid to it, by the fact that Italians at the time could not but feel that they were 'involved', in however mediated a fashion, in the daily developments; developments which themselves took mainly the form of words issued by the government, by the BR and by Moro himself.

Few books written since resist the temptation to reconstruct the tension or suspense (the trauma?) that this process implies. The suspense is (re)created in the Moro books by a punctilious narration of the kidnap that climaxes with Moro's assassination, and this is as true of sociologist and historian Alison Jamieson's version (1989) of the kidnapping – a breathless chronicle divided by day and date – as it is of Anna Laura Braghetti's account of the quotidian reality of Moro's prison and the

4 Director Marco Bellocchio sums up the spectrum of the criticism thus (with the implication that the different criticisms came from left and right respectively): 'I have been accused of being too damning - saying that the terrorists were little religious fanatics. Or I was too benevolent when in fact they were criminals, assassins' (Arie 2004: 11).

5 It is not controversial to describe as state terrorism the repressive tactics, extending to political assassination, practiced by the fascist regime. Less commonly referred to as such are the coercive and repressive methods employed by the liberal state that preceded fascism, which established an authoritarian attitude in Italian political culture that has among its heirs the would-be practitioners of coups d'état and the state facilitators of the right-wing terrorism of the 1960s and 1970s. Likewise, unified Italy has always had its internal opponents, and many have had recourse to methods we could describe as terrorist: pro-Bourbon brigandry in the South; anarchist bombings, assassinations (including that of king Humbert I in 1900) and several attempted insurrections from the 1870s until well into the twentieth century (Rimanelli 1998). The strategy of provoking vicious backlash, in

inexorable advance towards his death. The impulse at work in this kind of narrative history is akin to the fictional impulse; namely, there is a kind of morbid gratification in retracing the *Via Crucis* of the doomed man. The form represents a kind of traumatic recurrence to the experience as it was mediated during the 54 days of the kidnap, culminating again and again in the death of Moro. However, an effect of the use of fictional mechanisms in chronological reconstruction is that it encourages the fantasy that the tragedy may not end, in a particular telling, in the way we know it to have ended. The suspense panders to the readerly or spectatorial desire to have an alternative, ideal outcome: as if, just this once, Moro might walk free and the nightmare of the nation held in check might end with the dawn of awakening. It is an effect acknowledged and parodied in *Buongiorno, notte*, which adheres to the tragic chronology but which, in its final sequences, offers the fantasy scene of Moro walking free from his prison.

The counterfactual scene of Moro's escape is played twice at the close of *Buongiorno, notte*. The first time it is followed by images of Moro being taken out by his captors to his death, themselves followed by archive footage, run in sarcastic slow motion, of the state funeral service held in the absence of Moro's body.[13] But Moro's fantasy walk is played again as the film ends, accompanied now by a jaunty tune from Schubert rather than the portentous segment from Pink Floyd that has accompanied the previous scenes.

The meaning of the reprised scene of Moro's walk is complex, and has provoked different readings. Rachele Tardi (2005: 56n) has suggested that the fantasy promenade is through the zone of EUR and she speculates that Bellocchio may intend an allusion to Pier Paolo Pasolini, the controversial writer, murdered in 1975, who had lived in the zone.[14] In fact, the walk takes place near the street of Moro's incarceration, located across the river from EUR, but with a *view* (in carefully framed long-shot) of the zone. The view contains, most imposingly, the so-called 'Colosseo Quadrato', a monumental neo-classical edifice built in the latter years of the Fascist period, which for Lombardi (2007b: 405–407), in his subtle analysis of the closing minutes of *Buongiorno, notte*, represents 'a state built on cruelty, where the public executions of imperial Rome are joined to the ideological blindness of the Rome of Mussolini'. For Lombardi, Moro's morning walk from his prison is a symbolic resurrection, in a (disguised) Christian register, of the former *political* being whose *human* body was, of course, absent from its official funeral service. At the same time, the Colosseo Quadrato is a building featured in a key scene of Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome Open City*, 1945), when partisans liberate a lorry-load of comrades, and Bellocchio no doubt intends the allusion, given the references to the Resistance, and use of clips from the same director's *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946), elsewhere in *Buongiorno, notte*.[15] As Dana Renga (forthcoming) writes:

> The escape scenes in both films contrast the final, memorable vision of Rossellini's film when paired Italian boys march towards St. Peter's after witnessing Don Pietro's execution at the hands of the fascists [. . .]. The children in *Roma, città aperta*, veritable sons of Partisans, walk towards the famous church after Don Pietro's death at dawn as Moro does towards [the Colosseo

the hope of fomenting popular insurrection, employed by urban anti-fascist resistance groups in World War II can also be described as essentially terroristic (Ginsborg 1990: 64): it anticipates the approach of the Red Brigades three decades later, the aim of which was to reveal the 'hidden fascism' of Christian Democracy by inducing it to reveal its brutally repressive face. Terrorism in Italy has also had a nationalist or regionalist character: post-war Italy saw independence movements in Sicily and Sardinia, and from the latter half of the 1950s, groups in the South Tyrol carried out attacks in the attempt to secure a regional autonomy ultimately granted in 1969. Finally, we should bear in mind that some of the actions of the Mafia and other organised criminal groups can be defined as terrorist (see della Porta 1995; della Porta and Rossi 1984; Engene 2004: 134–141). For an influential discussion of the problems of defining terrorism, see Schmid and Jungman (1988).

6 The phrase *anni di piombo* derives from the Italian title given to a German film: Margarethe Von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* – literally 'the leaden time' – shown at the Venice film festival in 1981 where it received that year's top festival prize. The phrase is problematic in that the transition from

> Quadrato] in Bellocchio's film. In Rossellini's film, the main protagonists Don Pietro and Manfredi die as Christ figures, martyrs to a new Italy that is both Catholic and Socialist. In substituting the spiritual seat of Catholicism with historical fascism's most evident physical tribute, is Bellocchio suggesting that the death and martyrdom of Don Pietro, Moro and countless partisans was in vein? Or, possibly, that the revolutionary principles held so dear by members of the Partisan resistance only served as fodder for the BR?

Perhaps. Above all, however, it seems to me that the scene points to something I have already suggested: that a text like *Buongiorno, notte* is a palimpsest; the film is not only posited upon the spectator's knowledge of the Moro kidnapping and its outcomes, but also on the variety of representations and theories about the kidnapping. Thus, what *Buongiorno, notte* omits is as significant as what it includes: it has no reconstruction of the violent kidnap scene in Via Fani, a persistent motif in other films and television histories;[16] there is no hint of the conspiracy speculation typical of much of the kidnap literature and cinema;[17] there is little even of the ideologies that motivated the kidnap; and finally, the scene of Moro's death is discretely omitted. Instead, the film contains a complex network of allusions to other films and even to itself (the reflexive motif of a film script, entitled, precisely, *Buongiorno, notte*, written by a character in the film) which demonstrate that there is no direct access to historical understanding but that such understanding is constructed via narration and representation.[18] The allusive strategies of the filmmaker recall that the Moro kidnapping itself demonstrated with particular salience the truism that history is always grasped as story.[19]

Buongiorno, notte was much discussed and criticised on its Italian release. It was a cultural event that strayed off the culture pages to the news sections of the Italian press, and provoked censure from both right and left.[20] One particularly trenchant observation was that Bellocchio seems to exonerate the protagonist Chiara, shown to be exhausted with the armed struggle and presented as a 'terrorista pentita [repentant terrorist] ante-litteram', to use the description of Luca Bandirali and Enrico Terrone (2004: 4; see also Pirani 2003: 19). In reality, Anna Laura Braghetti, the model for Chiara, remained an active member of the BR and went on to assassinate Vittorio Bachelet, the vice-president of the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura (the regulatory body of the Italian magistrature), in February 1980, almost two years after the Moro events (Braghetti and Tavella 2003: 129–134; Calvi et al. 2003: 215).

Chiara's premature disaffection is, then, another counterfactual aspect of *Buongiorno, notte* to add to the fantasy representation of Moro's escape at the end of the film; but rather than seeing it as a typical, and typically bemoaned, inaccuracy of historical film, it might be better to understand it as one more indication of the central place Moro's kidnapping and death occupy in Italian culture. The Moro kidnapping is the central location in the Italian 'canon' of terrorist events where the iconoclast may pitch her revisionist tent. At the same time, the older readings are never wholly effaced: the conspiracy theories do not disappear because Bellocchio ignores them, and no-one is likely to be fooled by the anticipation in *Buongiorno, notte* of the end of the terrorist season. The power of Chiara's change of heart and the explicitly fictional liberation of her prisoner are

the German adjective 'bleierne', intended to connote the 'leaden' weight of history, to the Italian noun 'piombo' with its clear metaphorical allusion to bullets, implicitly excludes the bombings characteristic of right-wing terrorism. This effect has been further exaggerated when the phrase is rendered in English. In Paul Ginsborg's *History of Contemporary Italy* (1990), it becomes, in a chapter sub-heading (p. 379), not 'years of lead', but, precisely, the 'years of the bullet', and all potential ambiguity about the figurative character of the 'lead' is lost.

7 For a concise account of the *strategia della tensione* and the part played in it by elements within the state and by international influences, see Bull and Newell (2005: 101–104). The topic is treated at greater length in Ferraresi (1996). It should be mentioned that the division of terrorist strategy described here is extremely schematic: the right also used small-scale violence and targeted assassination, while the left sometimes used arson and bomb attacks against property (see Rimanelli 1998: 236–52).

8 See O'Leary (2005, 2007: 13–24) and especially Uva (2007: 13–94) for brief introductions to the whole corpus.

9 See Tota (2002,

matched by the frank contingency they imply in the film's reconstruction of the episode. To put this another way, the criticism that greeted *Buongiorno, notte* upon release is based upon a blindness to the character of the film as palimpsestic and allusive text.

The attacks made against *Buongiorno, notte* have their point of departure in the notion of the autonomous work of art, the masterpiece that would give the 'last word' and final verdict on the Moro events. *Buongiorno, notte* has no pretensions to being the last word; instead it overwrites the other words, and more especially, it inquires into how such words are enunciated. The presence within the film of clips from television and from cinema – among them Stalinist propaganda, a famous scene from Rossellini's *Paisà*, television reportage and the archive footage of the state funeral service held in the absence of Moro's body – functions to undo the integrity, the sense of self-identical solidity, so to speak, of the film as a textual object. *Buongiorno, notte* is made to seem, rather, a node or meeting place where competing discourses vie for the viewer's attention and for that of the protagonist. This is, of course, exactly what happened during the unfolding of the kidnap itself, when a series of conflicting representations emerged from the kidnappers, from the government and security apparatus, and from Moro himself, all trying to define the meaning and outcome of the kidnapping.

So we can repeat: *Buongiorno, notte* is less a film about the Moro kidnapping than one about the means by which we construct our understanding of such events. It is a film which not only offers a political interpretation of the Moro kidnapping,[21] but one that thematises the representational means through which we construct such interpretations.

In part, this is achieved through the use of interpolated clips from other films, in part through the inclusion of a character in the story, Enzo, who writes a film-script with the same title as the film we are watching, a device adjudged crude by many critics. For Guido Bonsaver (2004: 29), it is 'a meta-fictional dimension that's somewhat gratuitous and awkwardly planted at the heart of the story'; for Bandirali and Terrone (2004), the character of Enzo is 'the man who knew too much', an out-of-time figure who, while in the middle of the story, somehow always-already knows the outcome of events, and so foresees (in print) the failure of the revolutionary project and of the kidnap that is a figure for it:

> He has the privilege of a retrospective gaze and the gift of a knowledge which exceeds the bonds of the present-past of the characters and belongs instead to the present-future of the director and spectator. The man who knew too much always already knows the match result and the moral of the tale. [. . .] He knows how to read the future in the light of the historical present, while in reality he is reading the historical present in the light of the future [. . .]. [He has] the capacity to foresee the failure of a revolutionary project even while finding himself right at the centre of the very same project.
>
> Bandirali and Terrone 2004: 4

If the critics are right, Enzo is Bellochio's narcissistic projection of himself (and perhaps a flattering projection of the spectator) into his own film, offering a didactic judgement on historical events in a way that is itself, because of its anachronism, profoundly unhistorical:

2003). According to a survey reported by Biacchessi (2005), many young Bolognesi believe the Bologna Station bomb to have been planted not by the elements on the extreme right, but by the BR.

10 As Lombardi (2007: 405) points out, the martyrdom of Moro has also all but completely eclipsed popular record of his political career (see also note two).

11 See note three for a list of the 'Moro films'. The allusion, usually by means of reproduction of the notorious photographs, to the Moro events has become a commonplace in films about the years of lead, allowing a shorthand evocation of the period and granting an economic if clichéd historical authenticity. *I cento passi* (*The 100 Steps*, Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000), for example, has recourse to the Moro episode as an essential point of reference in its recuperation from obscurity of the memory of Peppino Impastato, a victim of the Sicilian Mafia. The juxtaposition of Impastato's fate with that of the DC president is a polemical move by the filmmakers: it accepts as unassailable the cultural status of the death of Moro, but, by comparison, it elevates that of Impastato to an equivalent pitch of tragedy and significance, insisting that the lesser-known murder should figure

> In *Buongiorno, notte* the librarian Enzo [. . .] never misses an occasion to indicate forcefully [to Chiara] the errors she is making, and to show her the route of re-conversion back to the quiet life. [. . .] Here the man who knew too much knows and even explains the title of the film in which he himself is present, having himself written the screenplay and presented it to the protagonist of the event narrated [i.e. to Moro, in whose bags the script is discovered] (had he read the typescript sent from the future, Moro would have been able to foil the kidnap all on his own).
>
> Bandirali and Terrone: 4

Leaving aside the question of whether a present perspective can ever genuinely be suspended in a historical work, one can agree with the thrust of the critics' remarks without necessarily following their tone, nor need one feel obliged to apologise for the signifying clumsiness of the presence of the auteur's emissary within the diegesis. Enzo is less a character than a function: his presence signals to the viewer the work of revision undertaken. The didactic and privileged perspective present in, and through, Enzo should be understood as an admission and inscription of the authorial perspective into the text in a way meant to alert the spectator to its presence. The *mise en abîme* is an alienating device that is part of the film's thematisation of its own means of historical argument, a mode of address intended to engage rather than seduce the spectator.

The confusion between the poetic reconstruction of events and their revisionist reinterpretation in *Buongiorno, notte* is deliberate. The jarring interpolation of sequences from other films, while illustrating Chiara's subjectivity, also forces our attention to how film constructs our impression of history precisely though a rhetorical invocation and embellishment of the 'facts'. But this process always occurs in negotiation or dialectic with other texts and discourses – including, naturally, other films. Thus, if the clip of Stalin benignly waving to an adoring crowd is unlikely to impress us today with anything but its sinister absurdity, the glimpse of the Italian partisans being drowned from the end of Rossellini's *Paisà* has lost none of its power to move or to mythologise the struggle against Nazi-Fascism at the end of the Second World War in Italy. The sequence is used in *Buongiorno, notte* to show how Chiara has come to identify her captive with the partisans and their fate; but *Paisà* is a doubly appropriate intertextual element in that the six individual episodes of Rossellini's film only acquire their meaning in the context of the frame of the film itself, and then in the context of broader historical discussion and knowledge.[22] Within its episode, the martyrdom of the partisans in *Paisà* is a disgusting and useless loss; 'outside' the film, we know that the partisans' cause was victorious and so that the sacrifice was not in vain —— but we need this knowledge to make thematic sense of the story. The counterfactual representation of Aldo Moro's escape in the penultimate sequence of *Buongiorno, notte* is akin to the death of these partisans in *Paisà*, not so much because Moro is 'like' the partisans (as Chiara believes), but because it is not the 'real' end of the film or story: *Paisà* too is a palimpsest that relies on an overwriting of the already known. *Buongiorno, notte*, allowing Moro to go free, indulges a national fantasy, but Bellocchio deliberately fools nobody.

as just as crucial a reference point in Italian memory. The shared cultural datum of Moro is again invoked in *Romanzo criminale* (Michele Placido, 2005) which uses the epic tale of a Roman criminal gang to adumbrate the now-familiar conspiracy backdrop to the kidnapping. The film also portrays the bombing of the Bologna train station in August 1980, and Moro and Bologna are granted a moot equivalence and joint status of quintessentially recognizable or 'spectacular' happenings of the *anni di piombo* – something underlined by the use made of newsreel footage of both events.

12 The phrase 'il mito del rapimento' (the myth of the kidnap) has been used by Alberto Soncini (2003: 4).

13 Moro's family had withheld his body in order to honour Moro's own wish that there be no official ceremonies to mark his death. The footage shows the pompous and unsteady entrance of Paul VI on his portable papal throne and the iconic faces of familiar Italian politicians.

14 Pasolini and Moro are both treated as sacrificial figures in *Maledetti vi ameró* and are also compared in Leonardo Sciascia's influential *L'affaire Moro* (1989, originally published 1978).

15 A more esoteric allusion still might be deciphered: the

Conclusion

A society's understanding of its past is constructed through a negotiation, however unequal, between different interests and discourses. As Pierre Sorlin (1980: 17) puts it (in a classic text on historical film): 'Most societies [. . .] create their history as they evolve. And in these societies certain groups, social classes, political parties and socio-professional communities define their own version of the past'. Commentators may object that film is too crude a medium and too contingent upon its formal, industrial or market constrictions to be taken seriously as historiography. But to apply the criteria of a primarily written and document-based historiography to a visual and commercial medium like cinema is to misunderstand what it is that film is equipped to achieve.

Traditional attempts to critique historical films from the perspective of the professional historian tend to fixate upon issues of factual accuracy, which are most often beside the point, in that a positivistic factual accuracy is both beyond the means of the commercial film and rarely part of the intentions of the filmmakers. One thinks of the criticisms, mentioned above, of *Buongiorno, notte's* portrayal of the protagonist as a 'terrorista pentita ante-litteram', when in reality the model for the character of Chiara, Anna Laura Braghetti, remained committed to her cause and the violent means chosen to achieve its ends. Such criticism overlooks the film's character of palimpsestic text that overwrites and refers to other versions of the kidnapping, including, but hardly limited to, Braghetti's memoir of her time as a *brigatista*. *Buongiorno, notte* makes no pretence to historiographic reconstruction in conventional terms, and it would, therefore, be nonsense to consider it as such; likewise, the text is no 'mirror' of the history it overwrites even as it is reconstructed. In the film, memory pitches into daydream as the Moro we know to have died walks free from the 'people's prison' in ironic fulfilment of a national fantasy. *Buongiorno, notte* is a text that knows itself to have come late, and with Moro's counterfactual liberation, and the interpolation of clips from other films, it acknowledges its contingent (as distinct from authoritative) place in the *filoni* of terrorist film and in the wider historical discourse of the *anni di piombo*. By extension, it cannot be entered into the critical canon of Italian films which, for the most eminent historian of Italian cinema, Gian Piero Brunetta (2007: v), constitutes 'the attentive and faithful mirror of [Italian] life and quotidian history': *Buongiorno, notte* represents an implicit critique of the 'mirror' metaphor of the (privileged) relationship of story and history, proffering that of the palimpsest in its stead.

The chronological narrative offered in the Moro books, and in films like *Buongiorno, notte*, is a kind of 'homage' to the original tense chronology of the Moro kidnap and murder as it unfolded in real time in the Italian media, but the homage is a self-aware one in *Buongiorno, notte*. The film is a meditation not on the Moro events in themselves, but on the place of the memory of Aldo Moro in Italian culture and on the means by which the perception and historicising of the Moro kidnapping is generated.

Acknowledgement

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Colosseo Quadrato – more properly, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana – is the intended site (after restoration) of the Museo dell'audiovisivo, currently housed at the Discoteca di stato in via Caetani – the location of the discovery of Moro's corpse.

16 It is portrayed in *Il caso Moro*, *La notte della repubblica* (*The Night of the Republic*, a television documentary series from 1989–1990 directed by Sergio Zavoli *et al*., one episode of which borrows the reconstruction from *Il caso Moro*), *The Year of the Gun* and *Piazza delle Cinque Lune*.

17 Tardi (2005: 56) finds a possible acknowledgement of the conspiracy theories in the scene where Chiara dreams of liberating Moro, only to spy the police outside the apartment door.

18 Mario Pezzella (2004: 196) has pointed out that Moro is most often observed in the film through the spyhole in his cell door – an obvious metaphor for the gaze of the camera and how it circumscribes our vision while allowing us to see.

19 Famously, the writer and public intellectual Leonardo Sciascia recounted how the events of the kidnap were received with a sense of literary *déjà vu*: 'One got used to the unavoidable impression that the Moro *affaire* had already been written,

that it was already a completed work of literature' (1989: 477).

20 See note 4.

21 Bellocchio has said that his film was meant to demonstrate that 'allowing Moro to be killed was a grave political as well as human error' (quoted in Aspesi 2003: 14). It has to be said that such an assertion has become a commonplace and certainly forms part of the martyrdom discourse that has almost monopolised discussion of the kidnap. For a dissenting view, see Ginsborg (1990: 385): 'The crisis of Italian terrorism, as is generally recognised, dates from the death of Moro. With hindsight, it would thus seem correct to argue that those who advocated intransigence were in the right. Had Moro not been killed but exchanged for one or more imprisoned terrorists, the Red Brigades would have appeared both invulnerable and willing to compromise, with the result that their appeal would almost certainly have widened'.

22 *Paisà* constructs a montage portrait of an occupied Italy at war as the film moves in six episodes from Sicily up through the peninsula (Naples, Rome, Florence, the Apennine mountains) to its tragic end in the Po valley. The images of the partisans being drowned in an act of appalling cruelty at

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the end of the final episode are followed by a narrating voiceover telling us that a few months later the war would be over, a remark itself followed by the end title of the film.

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'Welcome to Dreamland': The realist impulse in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Last Resort*

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Abstract

After first exploring Pawel Pawlikowski's status as an outsider in British cinema through a brief comparison to German director Fatih Akin, I focus on Pawlikowski's film Last Resort *(UK, 2000) to assess and problematize its portrayal of refugees. I argue that rather than relying on open didacticism, Pawlikowski's representation of asylum seekers defies the established conventions of the genre, highlighting the fragility of hospitable conventions. Neither portraying them as despairing victims lacking agency nor commending them as virtuous 'heroes' (as if by default),* Last Resort *does not allow its spectators an easy access to the spectacle of the Others' suffering. Instead, it points to the discrepancy between the projected image of Britain as a welcoming country and the exclusions through which it operates. Moreover, the focus on a Russian woman's narrative provides the opportunity to open up a discussion on how whiteness is negotiated in a European context. Given that a majority of films portray Britain as a utopian land strongly desired by migrants, Pawlikowski's significant intervention is that he ultimately presents it as a 'counter-utopia', a space from which one wishes to escape. Since Pawlikowski's 'poetic realism' has been aligned with that of Michael Winterbottom's, in the last part of the article I discuss* Last Resort *in conjunction with Winterbottom's* Wonderland *(UK, 1999).*

Keywords

Pawlikowski, Pawel
British cinema
Last Resort
asylum seekers
whiteness
counter-utopia

According to film critic Steve Blandford, 'the purest essence of Englishness in contemporary cinema' may be found in the work of 'a British director with an outsider's sensibility' (2007: 42). The cinema of Pawel Pawlikowski [especially his film *My Summer of Love* (2004)], in his view, is able to 'defy monolithic definitions of the English' and capture 'the essence of our English identity' which 'actually resides not at the metropolitan centre, but in the diverse manifestations of English regionalism' (2007: 20). Blandford, therefore, situates Pawlikowski in the context of an 'English' cinema with distinctive characteristics within British Cinema. While recognising that for most people, 'British' means 'English', he points out that although there is a growing recognition of the emergence of a cinema that could be defined as Scottish or Welsh, there is little academic discussion on how filmmakers respond to the problematics of Englishness in the age of devolution in Britain (2007: 19). Notwithstanding Blandford's remarks, however, I believe that Thomas Elsaesser makes a fine observation when he notes that 'it is impossible [. . .] to affirm a single national or

ethnic identity through the cinema: it is more a question of how a country can speak to itself, how it is 'spoken' by others, and how the others 'inside' speak themselves or ask to be represented' (2005: 55). With this in mind, in what follows I will first explain Pawlikowski's positionality as a film-maker and explore his status as an 'outsider' in British cinema through a brief comparison to the German director Fatih Akin. In the remaining part of the article I focus on Pawlikowski's *Last Resort* (UK, 2000) to assess and problematise the film's portrayal of refugees. I argue that rather than relying on open didacticism, Pawlikowski's representation of asylum seekers defies the established conventions of the genre, highlighting the fragility of hospitable conventions. Neither portraying them as despairing victims lacking agency nor commending them as virtuous 'heroes' (as if by default), *Last Resort* does not allow its spectators an easy access to the spectacle of the Others' suffering. Instead, it points to the discrepancy between the projected image of Britain as a welcoming country and the exclusions through which it operates. Although the film presents us with a bogus refugee, the focus on a Russian woman's narrative brings to the fore a new set of questions about class, whiteness and neoracism, which I will address. Moreover, given that a majority of films portray Britain as a utopian land strongly desired by migrants, Pawlikowski's significant intervention is that he ultimately presents it as a 'counter-utopia', a space from which one wishes to escape. Since Pawlikowski's 'poetic realism' has been aligned with that of Michael Winterbottom's, the last part of the article is dedicated to an analysis of *Last Resort* in conjunction with Winterbottom's *Wonderland* (UK 1999).

Rejecting a 'Cinema of Duty': situating Pawlikowski's 'Poetic Realism' in the context of British cinema

It is unlikely that one would go as far as to ask, 'Is the New British Cinema Polish?', as if echoing Tunçay Kulaoglu's by now famous article, 'Is the New German Cinema Turkish?' (1999). Nor would one even describe the films of Pawlikowski as British-Polish. However, when addressing the director's status in British cinema, a brief comparison to the reception and positionality of a film-maker like Fatih Akin in Germany may not be too far-fetched. They are both young, audacious directors who have moved relatively quickly and successfully from margin to mainstream. Tackling issues of marginalised groups in society through a distinctive approach, their work has marked a significant difference in the national cinemas in which they are working. As Elsaesser comments, 'it is remarkable how cinema has become the most prominent medium of self representation and symbolic action that the hyphenated citizen of Europe's nation states have made their own' (2005: 119).

Both Pawlikowski and Akin are displaced film-makers, distinguished by an 'accented' style which is described by Hamid Naficy as 'interstitial', simultaneously global and local, resonating against the prevailing cinematic productions while benefiting from them at the same time (2001: 4). A similar attitude of rebellion against established conventions of representation is overtly expressed by both directors. In an article dedicated to Akin, Daniela Berghahn points out that the film-maker rejects the cinema

of his forebears (2006: 141–42). In this case, the rebellion is directed against the first generation of Turkish-German film-makers as well as other German ones who have produced what critics now call a 'cinema of the affected' or a 'cinema of duty'. According to Deniz Göktürk, the films belonging to the 'cinema of duty' of the Turkish-German directors of the 1980s replicated New German Cinema's strategies of victimisation in their representation of minority subjects (2000: 67).[1] The problem with such films, Angelica Fenner points out, is that 'they address a hegemonic viewership by evoking the viewers' pity and sympathy, emotions which essentially affirm and perpetuate the static Manichean configuration of oppressor and oppressed' (2000: 116). Although Akin usually rejects the label of hyphenated identity film-maker, the fact that his films address 'the migrant's experience of rootlessness, of culture clash, and of living between or in two worlds' (Berghahn 2006: 143) has led critics to call him an 'accented film-maker'. This means, above all, that his work reflects a 'double consciousness' (Berghahn 2006: 145) resulting from the director's investment in two backgrounds (in this case Turkish and German).

Similarly, Pawlikowski is a rebel of sorts on the British cinema scene, also engaging with themes that probe the immigrants' experience of travel, displacement and isolation. Whereas Akin was born in Germany, Pawlikowski came to Britain from Poland as a teenager. He positions himself as an outsider in contemporary British cinema, fearlessly criticising contemporary British realist films for 'drowning in sociology – how people speak, everyone is so self-conscious' (quoted in Foley 2004). In other words, one could say that Pawlikowski has expressed his own dissatisfaction with the 'cinema of the affected' in a British context. Few contemporary British films appeal to the director's tastes. Rather, he prefers the British cinema of the 1960s, with which he became acquainted as a child when his mother, a lecturer in English at Warsaw University at the time, took him to the British Council to watch films in a language he barely understood.

In an interview with Les Roberts, he deplores the fact that contemporary British directors 'either idealize the working classes' or use 'gangsters to do something interesting' (2002: 96). Indeed, Pawlikowski openly critiques films that misrepresent the problems of marginalised groups in society by presenting characters as types. The problem with many films about refugees, he emphasises, is that they present the characters as victims who lack individual autonomy. Dismissive of genre categorisations that reduce his films to labels such as 'refugee films' or, as in the case of *My Summer of Love*, 'lesbian' or 'coming out' films, Pawlikowski maintains that the mere fact of making a film 'where the characters are not stooges is in itself a political gesture' (Porton 2005: 41). Aware of his reception as a film-maker, he ironically notes: 'Some call me a gritty realist; others accuse me of poetry and vagueness. And then there's my background to further muddy the waters: while the Brits can't help intuiting gloomy Polish fatalism in everything I touch, the Poles are tickled by my supposedly very British sense of irony' ('My Summer of Love').

Whereas Akin has expressed a deep interest in the American hip-hop culture's 'sampling' techniques (Berghahn 2006: 144), Pawlikowski

1 For a critique of 'the cinema of duty' in Britain, see Malik 1996.

prefers to stress instead his literary and philosophy background, declaring an interest in existential rather than sociological questions. 'In landscape as well as actors', Pawlikowski maintains, 'I'm always looking for something contradictory that reminds me both of my past and of literature' (quoted in Porton 2005: 38). Like Fatih Akin, he has never been properly trained in documentary or feature filmmaking, but more importantly, like Akin, he develops his own scripts, working with actors while constructing his stories. Akin started his career as an actor, and began making films because he no longer wanted to play the 'stereotype Turk' in films where 'migrants could only appear in one guise: as a problem' (quoted in Berghahn 2006: 143). A former literature and philosophy student, Pawlikowski got interested in film-making after taking a film workshop at Oxford University. In 2004, Pawlikowski's position as a Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes University has given him the opportunity to teach students about the realist genres of contemporary film-making in Britain.

In order to describe Pawlikowski's 'unique' style, Dorota Ostrowska suggests that we should understand his features and dramas through his previous work on television documentaries as well as his background in photography (2007: 148). Speaking of *Last Resort*, Ostrowska argues that its images are neither purely televisual nor purely cinematic (2007: 157). Instead, they are 'kinesthetic', resulting from an 'osmosis' rather than a mere hybridisation of televisual and cinematic elements (Ostrowska 2007: 156). To distinguish Pawlikowski's realism from the more didactic 'critical realism' of a film-maker like Ken Loach or from the 'heightened realism' (Lay 2002: 89) or 'modernist realism' (Porton 2003: 164) of Mike Leigh, Samantha Lay calls it 'poetic' (2002: 110). When describing his own work, Pawlikowski has revealed his intention to create a 'mythic British realism' (quoted in Adams 2004: 2). In *Last Resort*, he tells us, he sought to build a slightly abstract stage for a drama that is stylised to the point where the real world is 'real but not real' (quoted in Roberts 2002: 97), like a dream whose effect in reality manages to remain powerful because it is hard to forget.[2]

2 Andrew Burke argues, following Zizek, that Pawlikowski revitalises a form of realism that is able to uncover the fictional aspect of reality precisely because its narrative has unreal dimensions and almost 'veers into the abstract' (2007: 184).

East-Europeans travelling in the New Europe: politics of hospitality, whiteness and neoracism in *Last Resort*

> An act of hospitality can only be poetic
>
> Jacques Derrida

The British Government's official tourist website (www.visitbritain.com), Imogen Tyler notes, deploys a certain discourse to create an ideological image of Britain and establish the profile of what the ideal visitor looks like:

> Right now Britain is one of the most exciting places on the planet, a world in one island. You will find a country of fascinating history and heritage, a country busy reinventing itself with confidence and style, influenced by the hundreds of nationalities who now call Britain home . . . The beauty of Britain will blow you away . . . Come and experience it for yourself now!
>
> ('Welcome to Britain Now!' 2007)

This welcoming gesture, however, is conditioned and fraught with contradiction. Despite its emphasis on policies of inclusion and diversity, the gesture of hospitality is not offered to all foreigners, foreclosing a number of possible identifications. The site's homepage greets visitors with the 'Welcome to Britain' banner, inviting one to choose one's country of origin from a given list of thirty-four countries. Significantly, however, all African nations (except South Africa) and all Eastern European countries (except Poland) are excluded from this list (Tyler 2006: 186). The notion of hospitality, or 'hostpitality' as Jacques Derrida puts it (2000: 45), has multiple, conflicting meanings, if one considers the filiation it has with its opposite, 'hostility'. Its etymological chain, *hosti-pet-s*, *potis, potest*, *ipse* sends us to words such as 'power', 'owner', 'despot' and *potest* (can). The Latin word *hostis*, from which hospitality derives, can be translated as both host/guest and enemy/stranger (Derrida 2000: 41–43). The German word for hospitality, *Gastfreundlichkeit* also has its root in *Geist*, reminding one of the spectral possibility of the enemy in the guest.

The discrepancy between the official projected image of Britain as a welcoming host country and the exclusions through which it actually operates is made evident in Pawlikowki's film *Last Resort*. The film points to the problematic moments when hospitality and benevolence create 'perverse dynamics' (Rosello viii). Focusing on the story of Tanya, a young Russian woman who travels to Britain with her son Artyom to meet Mark, her fiancé, *Last Resort* depicts an unfamiliar image of Britain. When Mark does not show up at the airport, Tanya is threatened with being sent back to Russia. Disappointed by this unexpected turn of events, she applies for political asylum and becomes a 'refugee by accident', a bogus refugee. She and her son Artyom are sent to Stonehaven, a remote and desolate resort where asylum seekers are detained. Alfie, an Englishman who runs the local bingo evenings and manages the amusement arcade 'Dreamland' falls in love with her, and helps her and Artyom to escape Stonehaven on a boat.

Originally conceived as a TV production for BBC Films, *Last Resort* managed to enter cinema distribution networks and won a few important awards. The refugee theme brought the film to the critics' attention, and their response has been overwhelmingly positive. Recognised for its ability to offer a new cinematic vision of what usually remains invisible in contemporary Britain, *Last Resort* has paradoxically succeeded to please both those concerned with the plight of refugees and those who adopted defensive attitudes towards 'outsiders' as a result of the media's insistence on a 'refugee crisis'.[3]

While recognising the film's qualities, Yosefa Loshitzky notes, however, that the film only questions the inhospitality of the authorities, and not that of the ordinary British people, who are presented as 'decent and welcoming' (2006: 752). As she comments, 'Tanya, the damsel in distress locked in the tower of detention, is eventually freed by Alfie, the gentle working-class hero' (2006: 752). Pawlikowski, however, falters when discussing the refugee theme of his film. In his view, *Last Resort* should be understood primarily as an exploration of the mother–son relationship. Irrespective of the director's intention, one is at pains to dissociate the mother-and-son narrative from the fact that the main protagonists are

3 For more on the media's construction of an asylum 'crisis' in the United Kingdom see Garner (2007: 147).

subjected to a special treatment by the authorities. In what follows, I argue that one may critically approach *Last Resort* by addressing the 'whiteness question' in a European context rather than an American one, in which whiteness theory was developed.

The whiteness theory stems from an American history approach which argues that whiteness gets forged during the early twentieth century as various different European ethnic groups, who otherwise have little or nothing in common in Europe, 'turn themselves white' against the contrast of people of colour. Whiteness, however, has to be understood as a racial designation despite the fact that it is usually neutral, not visible, unmarked. 'To trace the process by which Celts or Slavs became Caucasians', Matthew Frye Jacobson asserts, 'is to recognize race as ideological' (1988: 14). Racial whiteness, Jacobson argues, has been a contestable notion as a number of groups (Jewish, Irish, Armenian, Polish, Greek, Sicilian, Finnish and many others) faced challenges with respect to their racial lineage when they first came to the United States. They only became Caucasians over time, through a selective and filtering process. What the growing scholarship on 'whiteness' emphasises is that the process of being 'assigned' whiteness has proved to be 'a process intertwined with the ever-changing perceptions of race and ethnicity' (Marciniak 2006b: 40). Thus, whiteness has to be read critically, rather than simply assumed as a fact of life.

From this perspective, one could argue, as Viet Nguyen does, that whiteness is at the foreground in *Last Resort* and that it becomes a site of subjectivity. As Nguyen explains, this does not mean that whiteness has to be taken necessarily as something negative, that is, as positioned in contrast to people of colour. The potential problematic aspect comes not from the fact that the distance between white people and refugees of colour makes the romance between Tanya and Alfie possible, as one might think. Rather, it comes from the fact that this distance, the treatment of refugees as background, makes the foregrounding of white subjectivity possible. Whiteness, in this sense, should not be taken in a monolithic sense: what happens with the foreground/background effect is that 'a certain possibility of whiteness as racial commonality over whiteness understood as ethnic difference is made possible in the movie' (Nguyen 2007).

Sara Ahmed argues that whiteness is not reducible to white skin or to something one can be or possess, but that it involves a form of social and bodily orientation in the world. As a category of experience that 'disappears as a category through experience', whiteness becomes 'worldly' (2007: 150). In other words, some bodies are made to feel more 'at home' in a world that is oriented around whiteness (2007: 160). From this perspective, whiteness has to be understood in terms of a 'repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others' (2007: 159), a repetition that involves replicating 'a very style of embodiment, a way of inhabiting space, which claims space by the accumulation of gestures of "sinking" into that space' (2007: 159). When she speaks of institutions as 'being' white, Ahmed is drawing attention to how their spaces 'are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather, and cohere to form the edges of such spaces' (2007: 157). 'Likeness', therefore, has to be

understood as an effect of the proximity of shared residence. Just as two different peas in a pod come to be seen 'alike' as an effect of their contiguity, 'bodies come to be seen as "alike", as for instance "sharing whiteness" as a "characteristic", as an effect of such proximities' (2007: 155).[4]

Pawlikowski's use of a white asylum seeker provides the opportunity to open up a discussion on the complex process through which whiteness is negotiated in a European context. Just as immigrants have learned how *not* to be black as a way of becoming American, many East Europeans learn how to distinguish themselves from groups less white than themselves or less 'cultured' in the appropriate fashion, as a way to aid their own assimilation. In the determination to prove themselves 'European', East Europeans have often capitalised on their 'whiteness'. Depending on circumstances, East Europeans have adopted or been ascribed subject positions that are rarely brought under scrutiny. Eastern European nations' unspoken insistence on their whiteness, Anikó Imre rightly observes, 'is one of the most effective and least recognized means of asserting their Europeanness' (2005: 82). When it was possible to obtain the 'privileges' afforded by claiming a Gypsy/Romani subject position, some East Europeans have posed as Gypsies to obtain refugee status (Imre 2005: 86).[5] For the most part, however, they prefer to assert their 'racial purity' especially by disavowing any similarities with the Gypsy Other. Widespread frustration over Westerners' conflation of East Europeans with Gypsies has lead to numerous public outcries, especially in a country like Romania. Fearing that Romania has come to be seen as 'Rromania' in the eyes of outsiders, popular Romanian discourses have contested the Western Europeans' 'misrecognition' that purportedly identifies them as ethnic Roms/Romanies.[6]

It is important to recognise that in *Last Resort* Pawlikowski chooses a Russian actress to play a Russian woman, a Russian boy to play her son. Compare this to a movie like *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, UK 2002), where the main characters, two illegal immigrants in London, are played by a London-born actor of Nigerian descent and the French actress Audrey Tatou. Ultimately unpersuasive, these 'flawless' characters represent what Katarzyna Marciniak calls 'palatable foreignness' (2007: 193), that is, a safe encounter with otherness. The white Tatou, who poses as a Muslim Turkish woman named Senay, appears bare-shouldered on the DVD cover, enticing a Western audience to a readily accessible spectatorial visual consumption. With a little effort, Senay is 'just like us'. In this respect, the idea that despite cultural differences we are all the same 'sells a particular version of multiculturalism, one based on the logic of homogeneity and sameness', functioning 'as a safe panacea rather than an actual, risky engagement with difference' (Marciniak 2007: 197).

As a bogus refugee, Tanya is stranded by love rather than out of dire economical and political needs. Yet her 'whiteness' helps a non refugee audience (which might have a hard time identifying with real refugees, the 'colored' ones, or the ones less white than the norm) identify with her and thus empathise with her. In addition, the disruption of the romance plot marks the film's critique of classical Hollywood cinema and its generic nationalist narratives of assimilation that are often driven by heterosexual romance and consummation. The pornography strand of the plot, in

4 For an excellent review of whiteness studies, see Ahmed 2004.

5 'Rom', 'Romani' or 'Rromany' are ethnonyms chosen by Gypsy groups to avoid other pejorative appellations such as 'Tigani', 'gitano', or 'zigeuner' (just as 'jidan' was used as a slur for 'Jew'). Although the words 'Roma' and 'Romanian' have different origins, the phonetic similarity between them often creates confusion.

6 For further reference, see Woodcock 2007.

which Tanya's son surreptitiously watches women being filmed, becomes an ironic counterpoint to this, as the banal evil from which Tanya is rescued deeply implicates the audience, pointing to their own relationship to the spectatorial pleasure in watching women.

A significant aspect *Last Resort* brings to the fore is that while 'Fortress Europe' often views white people from former Communist countries as second-class citizens, these 'second world' citizens in their turn, often keep a distance from people of colour, from whom they often dissociate themselves.[7] Solidarity with them is often only momentary, coalitions provisory. The film makes it possible to gauge this through subtle details, such as when Artyom rather aggressively asks a woman of colour, 'What are you looking at?', in an effort to protect Tanya's vulnerability when crying. *Last Resort* actually begins with an exchange of reproaches between a white woman and a woman of colour: 'It's your fault!', 'No, it's *your* fault!'. Alfie comes to put a stop to this, and his comment that he is 'sick of this' suggests that such exchanges happen frequently. In another scene Alfie, anticipating Tanya's reaction to Indian food, tells her that 'If you throw up, it's all on my head. Naan bread to soak it up'. Tanya is ready to try the food, but asks for spoons.

To be sure, Tanya and Artyom find themselves stuck in a place traditionally reserved for Third World refugees. Part of Tanya's frustration with the way in which she is treated may stem from the fact that, during the Cold War, those few East European asylum seekers that managed to escape to the West were received with compassion, as both authorities and public opinion sympathised with them. In 1952, for instance, US president Truman stated explicitly in an official report on refugees from Eastern Europe that Americans 'want to stretch out a helping hand, to save those who have managed to flee into Western Europe, to succor those who are brave enough to escape from barbarism' (quoted in Marfleet 2006: 148). When deemed valuable for 'psychological warfare purposes', East European refugees were urged to expose the appalling conditions behind the Iron Curtain and were used by radio stations such as Radio Free Europe and Voice of America that broadcast to the East (Marfleet 2006: 149).

Last Resort renders visible the processes through which East Europeans are viewed through the tainted lens of neoracism. Although Tanya is a (white) artist, the hospitality she receives is conditioned by the simple fact that she is Russian. Her culture, therefore, functions 'like a nature' (Balibar 1991: 21) in the eye of the immigration officer. As Etienne Balibar maintains, current racism operates by insisting on *cultural* differences rather than biological ones as a way of sustaining political and economical inequality (1991: 21).[8] 'Neoracism' is a term that can be useful to describe representations of white East Europeans in 'Fortress Europe' and the way in which they may become 'safely "Orientalizable" while seemingly racially unmarked' (Forrester 2004: 10). In what follows I will show how *Last Resort* exposes the mechanisms through which this process functions.

The film begins with Tanya and Artyom's arrival at the airport as they are being carried backwards in the airport transit shuttle. The two passengers seem relieved that the long flight is finally over, aimlessly glancing sideways as the small glass cabin carries them through a dark tunnel towards the bright light of a sunny morning. Next, we see the two protagonists

7 For an analysis of racism in 'the second world' and the rhetoric of EU integration, see Marciniak 2006a. Anikó Imre points out that the lack of critical attention to issues of race and racism in Eastern Europe can be explained by the fact that the category of 'race' has remained undistinguishable from that of 'ethnicity' (2005: 83).

8 Andrew Zimmerman argues that Max Weber anticipated a neoracist thought that appeared only after decolonisation in Europe. Whereas at a first stage the European conquerors viewed 'the others' as racially inferior, the move from the colony to the metropole after decolonisation was received as a burden and sign of incompatibility between cultures.

waiting in line for passport control, clueless about what awaits them. The few scenes that follow are paradigmatic for the way in which the modern airport functions. 'As institutions', Robert Miles observes, airports 'embody in their existence and operation the process of globalization', having 'a significant role in the organization of ethnicity and the confirmation and transcendence of nationalism' (1999: 161). Space is organised in a way that reinforces class differentiation, classifying and differentiating between nationals and aliens, regulating movement as a site of national frontier. Indeed, as Marfleet points out, the notions of nation and alien form a 'dualism at the heart of modern political power' (2006: 264) since they are dependent on each other when they get to be defined.

After analysing how specific US immigration laws and restrictions have traditionally privileged Western Europeans over Eastern and Southern Europeans or non-white newcomers, Marciniak suggests that

> . . . sorting of desirable immigrants does not simply operate along the binarized lines of whiteness/nonwhiteness, where whiteness is a universally preferred racial marker. Rather, 'whiteness' needs to be understood as a *selective* metacategory that, working through 'filtering', privileges only the most 'appropriate' of the white bodies.
>
> (2006b: 40)

In this respect, *Last Resort* brings to our attention the way in which white bodies from Eastern Europe are 'filtered' in the UK. In his detailed analysis of airports in Britain, Miles argues that UK immigration legislation and policy has been shaped not only by racism and sexism, but also by class discrimination (1999: 164). Thus, not all arrivals are checked with the same degree of severity, as international passengers arriving at British ports are organised into separate channels for EU and non-EU nationals. The non-EU lines take longer, since passengers are asked a series of questions about the purpose and length of their intended stay in the United Kingdom. According to the official directives, the decision to grant 'leave of entry' is 'largely instinctive and based on experience' (Miles 1999: 173).[9] However, an instinctive exercise of power, Miles rightly notes, allows racialised, sexualised and also class-based cultural discourses to come into play through the supposed common sense of the immigration officers. In the United Kingdom, the Immigration Service at the airport has the power to detain any suspected person in 'secure accommodation' detention centres (Miles 1999: 175). Since 2000, the same year when *Last Resort* came out, a new policy of dispersing asylum seekers to provincial centres was put into practice in Britain (Garner 2007: 46). This decision was prompted by a public debate in Dover a year earlier, when a fight between local residents and asylum seekers that broke out at a funfair led to the stabbing of eight people (Lay 2007: 240).

What one immediately notices in the airport scene in *Last Resort* is that Tanya is waiting, together with a few other white as well as darker-skinned passengers, in a separate, special line meant for *Others*. In accordance with airport rules, Tanya is asked about her intended stay in the United Kingdom and how much money she has in her possession. When she admits that she

9 In a paper given at a 1998 workshop on 'Reintegrating European Cultures', Croatian writer Dubravka Ugresic reflects on her experience in the line with the sign of 'Others' in the European airports. See Ugresic 1998.

only has eighty-five dollars, and is unsure about how long she might stay in Britain, her passport and ticket are confiscated. While her luggage is searched for 'any documents that may pertain to her stay whilst in the UK,' she is further interrogated as to whether she is 'intending to *solicit* work whilst in the UK'. Faced with the possibility of having to go back to Russia immediately, the only solution she finds to gain enough time to locate her fiancé is to 'trick the system' by demanding political asylum. Unaware of what this entails, she soon finds herself trapped in a remote resort whose high fences and surveillance cameras prevent escape. When she gives up, admitting to a false claim, she learns that she has to wait for another 'three to six months' until her application is processed. As an asylum seeker, Tanya finds herself in a non-legal status. Her legality would only possibly come with her being granted refugee status. This shift in terminology occurred in the early 1990s, when the label 'asylum seeker' was introduced in various discourses in the UK 'as a way of bypassing the rights of the refugees prescribed by international law' (Tyler 2006: 189).

One important lesson that the viewer is able to learn from *Last Resort* is that the enthusiastic discourse about the objective of freedom and movement in the United Kingdom contrasts sharply with what happens in reality. The film exposes how issues of class and nationality, besides those or race and gender, still matter considerably.[10] Tanya is a professional artist who comes to Britain looking for love, but in the eyes of the immigrant officer she is a second-class citizen, an unwelcome, illegitimate newcomer. Contrary to her expectations, she discovers that her lack of money is a major obstacle to being allowed into the country. Money is not of primary concern for her, as she asks Artyom about the exact amount in their possession. In his turn, Artyom curiously watches as his mother is being photographed like a criminal and vehemently protests when police officers accompanied by dogs try to shove them into a police car. Until his mother shouts at him to calm down, explaining that she has applied for political asylum, he kicks his feet shouting, 'What do they want from us?'

Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler have recently brought to attention the fact the films run the risk of fetishising or romanticising the figure of the refugee so that we as spectators can be granted easy access to their sufferance, safely consuming their experience as 'border tourists' (2007: 28). Talking about 'the complex dialectic of gazes' in Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (UK, 2003), Loshitzky alerts us to a similar problematic, arguing that the spectator 'is placed in a "moral dilemma" whether he or she is entitled to derive pleasure from the other's suffering' (2006: 753). However, I contend that *In This World* is less successful in creating a moral dilemma for spectators than *Last Resort* because it fails to engage its audience in a self-reflective analysis. Presenting us with the various misfortunes of the Afghan refugees outside of Britain, the movie channels one's blame towards irresponsible smugglers and ignorant border guards.

In a critique of Giorgio Agamben's fetishisation of the refugee, a gesture that risks universalising the condition of displacement as something we all experience, Tyler warns that we must be aware of the extent to which the mobilisation of the figure of the refugee as 'our own' may 'offer "us" resources with which to imagine how "we", the already included, might reimagine "ourselves"' (2006: 198).[11] She makes an astute observation

10 Paul Dave remarks that films like *Last Resort* and *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) explore what has been called an 'immigrant underclass' (2006: 84).

11 In his essay 'Beyond Human Rights', Agamben argues that since the nation-state is 'irrevocably dissolving', in the emerging political condition it is the refugee, not the citizen that constitutes the only political category of being, 'the only thinkable figure for the people of our time' (1996: 159). The refugee represents for him a 'limit concept' that problematises the link between nativity, nationality, and citizenship. Imagining 'a coming community' premised on the idea of permanent exile, Agamben suggests that we all adopt the status of the refugee in symbolic defiance of the iron hand of the state and its territorial and political claims.

when she suggests that this mobilisation is precarious if it only serves to point to our 'similar' erosion of civil liberties (2006: 198). It is this aspect that a spectator watching *Last Resort* should keep in mind, as to avoid drawing easy analogies between 'them' and the way refugees are being monitored through CCTV cameras. Pawlikowski, however, is cautious about the limits of representation. In the film, the emphasis does not fall on what may shock us, or on giving us the impression that we may understand what it must be like to be a refugee in 'Fortress Europe'. The director works primarily in an allegorical mode, suggesting rather than showing things. A carefully chosen framing makes us aware of how we see and treat refugees. In this respect, the image of asylum seekers lined up for inspection by guards with big, howling dogs, has rich connotative powers, recalling representations of the Holocaust in particular.

Last Resort is a 'false documentary' on asylum seekers, but let us remember that this is how Alain Resnais promoted his 1959 film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. The film resists becoming 'just another film' about them, foregrounding certain ethical implications pertaining to the limits of representation. By choosing to portray Tanya's experiences as an asylum seeker in a narrative that does not end in victimisation, Pawlikowski eschews appropriating the figure of the 'other' in ways that blur distinctions between different experiences of being displaced from home. In this respect, he comments that 'Most outsiders in British cinema are sinister, comic, or victims to be pitied. I wouldn't dream of making a film about the Arab, Iranian or Chinese experience. I have no idea how the world looks from their perspective' (quoted in Kellaway 2006: 10).

Pawlikowski's 'bad guys' are not the usual villains who cruelly mistreat the immigrants' vulnerability. If in other films spectators are more likely to distance themselves from the action, filled with indignation at the evildoers 'out there', in *Last Resort* it is harder to place the blame on somebody else since everyone is generally polite, even the internet pornographer. Rather than indulging in open didacticism, the film constrains one to realise the illogical aspect of a perfectly rationalised system that quietly follows its routine. The director puts an accent precisely on the normality of its logic, whereby the 'wrongdoers' disavow the negative effects of their actions. In the very act of rummaging through Tanya's suitcase, the airport officer denies what he is doing: 'I'm just looking for any documents that might pertain to your stay whilst you are here in the UK; I'm not interested in what you might have'.

To be sure, *Last Resort* stages a discrepancy between reality and the way it is perceived by the 'Fortress Europe' ideology. The security guards are not 'as frustrated by the system as those to whom it applies', as Amy Sargeant argues in a recent book on British cinema (2005: 349). On the contrary, they regard themselves as benefactors, impervious to the alienating conditions in which asylum seekers find themselves. As one immigration officer puts it, 'anyone caught trying to escape from a designated holding area will be returned. If you attempted a second time, there will be no more nice flats, no more vouchers; it would be a prison cell'. The prevailing discourse mobilised by the authorities differentiates between 'prison' and 'designated holding area', as if the two were significantly different. In reality, the system denies the applicants the ability to be

meaningfully active without breaking the law. *Last Resort* makes it clear that contrary to widespread belief, asylum seekers, be they real or bogus, are prohibited from taking paid work (Garner 2007: 141). Cash benefits are replaced by vouchers that can only be used for food, and when their value is not used up to that of the purchase, change in cash is forbidden.

A counter-utopia

Pawlikowski's Stonehaven, shot in the real, well-known Margate seaside resort ('the loveliest skies in Europe', as Turner famously described it) is reminiscent of stereotypical images of Eastern Europe that have been perpetuated by the media. Such images portray a ghostly, desolate space which one might instantly 'recognize' as 'authentically' Eastern European. As they are part of the iconography of nationhood, landscapes function symbolically and are registered as such by our shaping perceptions of them (Ostrowska 2004: 2). In this respect, Loshitzky rightly notes that *Last Resort* manages to 'deconstruct the "Englishness" of the English landscape' (2006: 751). The reversal of established iconographies is accompanied however by an acknowledgment that the 'ugliness' at stake is also merely a construction. *Last Resort*, therefore, does not rely on binary oppositions – the immigrant's land as desolate and rejected versus a glamorised vision of the host country. Pawlikowski avoids fetishising the landscape of one's country of origin (as many films dealing with migrants do) or repudiating it (as Lukas Moodysson does for instance in *Lylia 4-ever* (Sweden 2002) by simply choosing not to show it. Disallowing an authenticity of vision, *Last Resort* presents the Margate seashore 'in its contradiction' and not merely as 'a type'. When Alfie, Tanya, and Artyom go out for a walk on the beach, the same landscape with hovering seagulls that previously conveyed a menacing effect is allowed to acquire an eerie beauty.

Admittedly, intrusive images of dark, gathering clouds are repeated throughout the film, creating an imprisoning, effect. This fragmentation of narrative through the repetition of similar images functions much like the black spacers in Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown* (France/Germany/Romania 2000) or the shuffled, speed images in Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland* (UK 1999). Yet whereas in *Code Unknown* these spaces achieve a modernist effect meant to alert us to the illusion of a coherent perception of reality that films give us (Riemer 2000: 161), in *Last Resort* they constitute a visual refrain, reiterating the constant feeling of entrapment of the asylum seekers.

Given Pawlikowski's critique of Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* (UK/USA 1997),[12] one might take *Last Resort*, which came out immediately after *Wonderland*, as a sort of response to Winterbottom's much-praised 'authentic' vision of London. Irrespective of his intentions though, by discussing *Last Resort* in conjunction with Michael Winterbottom's film, I argue here that *Last Resort* can be taken as a counter-utopia to the celebratory vision of Britain from *Wonderland*.

Welcome to Wasteland!

The big, ironic graffiti from a building in Winterbottom's film *Welcome to Sarajevo* (UK/USA, 1997), 'Welcome to Sarajevo, Help Bosnia Now!' is

12 Pawlikowski would perhaps enlist *Welcome to Sarajevo* as a movie belonging to 'a cinema of duty'. He has described it as a 'shallow piece of work. If you can't make a good political film, don't (quoted in Porton 2005: 41)'.

echoed with a twist in *Last Resort*, where a large advertisement from an amusement park greets the asylum seekers with the sign 'Welcome to Dreamland'. In Winterbottom's film, the graffiti represents an ironic invitation to a carnivalesque feast, an enticement to death and hell in 'Wasteland' Sarajevo. A similar sardonic effect is achieved in *Last Resort*, where the welcome banner signals a betrayal of expectations by appealing to film viewers' duplicity in recognising the futility of the welcoming gesture. The empty amusement park called Dreamland marks a disjuncture between reality and the allure of Britain as 'one of the most exciting places on the planet'. The scenes in which the shutters to Alfie's arcade (a place where voices may echo each other) rise gradually as immigrants wait outside may recall the slowly drawing back doors to Dracula's castle. Just as Bram Stoker's Dracula is urging his unlucky guests to 'enter freely and of their own will', the 'Welcome to Dreamland' banner offers a deceptive invitation, throwing the guests into the trap of their host's failed promise. Britain itself, in Pawlikowski's account, changes from empire to 'vampire', as the makeshift donating centre collecting blood from the vulnerable refugees metaphorically suggests.

It is evident that *Last Resort* showcases neither the heritage version of British national identity nor the 'Cool Britannia' of the late 1990s, with its focus on a New British identity fixated on youth, cool, and a metropolitan culture (Monk 2001: 34). As Claire Monk persuasively argues, the 'underclass' films of the 1990s (such as *Trainspotting*, *Brassed Off*, or *The Full Monty*), far from signalling economic and social concern, promote underclass life as a lifestyle which is hyped as an appealing commodity. Rather than animating the project of a socially committed British cinema, these films contribute to a wider re-branding of Britain in the late 1990s. In *The Full Monty*, for instance, 'the poverty and initial hopelessness of the characters only serves to heighten the effectiveness of the film's message: if the guys (skinny, fat, middle aged, unsexy) can succeed as male strippers, it surely follows that Britons (or anyone) can make a success of any enterprise' (Monk 2000: 276–77). This is not the case with Alfie from *Last Resort*. He may be the 'gentle working class hero' saving a damsel in distress, yet he is also trying to reclaim his dignity after the emasculating effects of unemployment. 'This town is full of fucked up people like me', he tells Tanya with a reconciled tone in his voice. Although for the most part he is in a position of superiority over her, he is never sure whether Tanya will eventually fall in love with him. At the end, when she finally rejects his offer to remain with him, he does not press the matter, most likely, it seems, because he has already resigned himself to the idea.

Samantha Lay points out, following John Hill, that one can identify in contemporary social realist texts two specific approaches that articulate a 'weakening of the ideologies of masculinity': failure and utopianism (2002: 104). Clearly, Alfie experiences a crisis of masculinity in the face of economic adversity, but Pawlikowski does not accentuate either his failure or a fantasy resolution that would 'save him from the brink of crisis' (Lay 2002: 104). The fact that Alfie engages in fights and that when he is by himself he rehearses boxing moves in front of the mirror suggests that he wants to be seen in control of things, as an authority figure that can

influence others. After Tanya leaves him, however, we can only infer that his life will remain the same.

According to Robert Murphy, the appeal of a film like *Wonderland* and a few other 'modest films' such as *Last Resort* and *The Low Down* (Jamie Thraves UK 2001) 'lies in its visually adept revelation of contemporary life in Britain' (2001: 3). Drawing on John Berger's comment that 'realism can never be defined as a style', he praises Winterbottom's film as 'a bridge to the underclass films' and the director's style for its 'poetic realism' (2001:3). The realism of *Wonderland*, Murthy maintains, comes especially from the director's insistence on filming in real locations.

It is my contention that pairing *Wonderland* with *Last Resort*, that is, the realism of 'Wonderland' and 'Wasteland', is problematic. When read in conjunction with several scenes from *Last Resort*, *Wonderland*'s evocation – or indeed 'revelation' as Murphy puts it – of 'contemporary life in Britain' is deceptive. Although *Wonderland* figures urban life as potentially isolating, it suggests at the same time that London is, as the 'Welcome to Britain' website promises, one of the most exciting place on the planet. Even though Winterbottom has revealed in interviews his efforts to achieve a visual parallel to Wong Kar-Wai's Hong Kong (Jeffries 2000: 1), some critics have especially stressed the director's portrayal of 'a London that you might actually recognize', not a 'tourist confection' (Jeffries 2001: 1). *Wonderland* never ceases to emphasise a London full of skyscrapers, celebrated by fireworks, happy children, and new born Alice's. Quite intriguingly, when people of colour show up, they do so mainly to interfere in white people's lives: a black woman tries to seduce a white woman's husband, her son follows the couple's daughter from a distance, and a black boy in the metro stops people for a penny. Although they may all go to bingo together, blacks and whites go to separate churches. At sports events, an almost exclusively white community comes together.

With these things in mind, if we are to remember Pawlikowski's comments that when shooting in London 'it's all like cultural wallpaper . . . and yet it feels like things are happening and things are really exciting: a kind of conspiracy the British film seems to promote' (quoted in Roberts 2002: 96), we may take *Last Resort* as a sort of 'anti-conspiracy' gesture. He too shows another stylised Britain, but at least not the utopian version of *Wonderland*, which dominates the spectators' fantasy of Britain. Given that so many scenes in *Last Resort* resonate with similar ones in *Wonderland* (the mother and son theme, the amusement park, the bingo scenes with a bingo-caller, feeling lonely and looking outside of one's window, watching *Blue Planet* documentaries on TV), it seems as if Pawlikowski comments on them visually and aesthetically. By undermining the fantasy of established iconographies of Britain, *Last Resort* provides spectators with a different set of visual textures, allowing them to let down their guard when watching the outsiders' misfortunes.

In an article about young cinema from Central and Eastern Europe, Christina Stojanova suggests that the main characters in these films 'embark on serendipitous quests . . . deliberately avoiding situations which would eventually force them into making definitive moral choices' (2005: 215). Pawlikowski's film marks a shift in this tendency, and the fact that Tanya is able to make a choice and envision 'going back' is important here.

She wants to resume her life back in Russia so that she does not repeat the mistake of marrying the wrong guy for her. She could stay with Alfie, who could be a caring father, and whom Artyom already loves. But the fact that she does not choose to do so (as if 'by default') is her private decision on what to do with her life. It is rare that a character coming from the second world is given this sort of agency and dignity by a film-maker. To be sure, Tanya's decision may frustrate the viewers' expectations, since Alfie is in many ways a likeable character who showers her with affection. However, this does not necessarily entail that she must fall in love with him.

It remains unclear whether Tanya's homecoming journey is going to be redemptive. What is evident, however, is that her desire to return does not stem from a yearning for an idyllic return to a mythic place, as is the case with many films portraying exilic or diasporic experiences. Neither linked with a liberating experience nor glamorised self-discovery, going 'home', in Pawlikowski's account, becomes just one option among possible others.

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Review

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Filmosophy, Daniel Frampton, (2006)

London: Wallflower Press, 254pp., ISBN 1-904764-84-3 (pbk), £15.00; ISBN 1-904764-85-1 (hbk), £45.00

Reviewed by Alexia L. Bowler, Swansea University

A passionate and earnest 'call-to-arms' regarding the state of film studies, Daniel Frampton's *Filmosophy* is a highly ambitious book. Heralded by its publishers as a 'manifesto for a radically new way of understanding cinema' (www.filmosophy.org), Frampton's work argues that film is a radically unique art form, which is able to 'think' its own world. Part of Frampton's project is to propose a new vocabulary with which we can apprehend cinema: one which will allow us to talk about, write about and experience the world of film in a way that cognitivist discourse has previously stifled. Frampton offers the reader a series of neologisms: 'film-mind', 'film-thinking' and 'film-being', as well as the titular 'Filmosophy'. None of these slip easily off the tongue, but are, the author hopes, terms which will facilitate a 'more poetic entry to the intelligence of film' (p. 8), rather than what he scathingly refers to as the 'technicist' language used in film criticism in recent decades.

Frampton's thought-provoking book is refreshing in its attempts to re-conceptualise the way in which we consider the visual image, and is passionate in its belief that cinema and visual culture has been poorly used. Frampton's attempts to critique our conceptual linking of cinema with reality, and question its link with anthropomorphic subjectivity, suggests that film is something 'other', or something that exceeds our current perception of it. The reduction of film to merely the 'illustrative tool' of philosophical and cultural debates in academic departments comes under criticism in Frampton's discourse, as he suggests that film has been subjected to a range of inappropriate theories through which we have been made to engage with film. Frampton regards much of the theory used to analyse film as coming out of the inherited disciplines of literary theory, linguistics and a criticism which uses a heavily technicist mode of deconstructing film. As such, Frampton views these as providing an exclusively anthropomorphic subjectivity and an artificially imposed methodology in film studies. Thus Frampton argues that our understanding of our relationship to the image is woefully incomplete, and that we should see film as formulating its own philosophy: we should see film as a kind of future thinking.

In conceptualising what he terms as the 'filmind', Frampton's argues that:

> [T]he filmind is distant from both reality and the brain, being neither ontological nor anthropomorphic: it neither shows us how things 'really are', nor what or how we 'really think'. It is its own mind, a preliguistic, affective world-mind, ready to think anything it wishes.
>
> (Frampton 2006: 201–202)

Frampton's 'filmind', then, works in conjunction with 'film-thinking', which Frampton asserts is not to be misunderstood as the 'summation of [a] film' but 'its constituting means'; that is, films' 'meanings' should not be the paramount objective of film and filmgoers, but instead its 'thinkings' should be a way of opening a film and revealing the 'ingredients' that made the viewer understand the film in a certain way (p. 193). Filmosophical writings are not, therefore, concerned with 'rip[ping] open a film's innards, but attempt to reflect the film in power and passion and feeling – listening to a film's thinking, and *pointing* to the power that it has' (pp. 180–181, original emphasis).

Through the concepts of Filmosophy, Frampton articulates his view that form and content should not be artificially severed, a method that he asserts is prevalent in western academic writing on film and the cinema. In its place, Frampton argues for a synthesis of the two: that is, we need to approach film as actively re-figuring our perceptions of its actions/events as dramatic and affective, rather than technical and effective, with form and content working together organically, creating a 'reality' that offers us its own 'thinking', or philosophy. He asserts:

> Form becomes just more content. *Film-thinking organicises the 'link' between form and content*. In making 'style' integral to content, Filmosophy hopes to enhance and emancipate the experience of the filmgoer. Realising film as thinking we can now understand moments more rhetorically: the film (through its affective forms) might be said to be crying in empathy, sweating out loud, feeling pain for the character (. . .) Experiencing a film as thinking produces a more meditative, contemplative filmgoer – unprogrammed and unpositioned, imaginative and open. The more 'human' concept of *thinking* allows our whole self to attend to the film – we then might think *with* it, instead of via stuttering terminology and against it.
>
> (Frampton 2006: 174–175. original emphasis)

This, he argues, could open up new ways of seeing things, and new ways to talk about cinema.

Certainly, films like Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Lynch's recent *Inland Empire* (2007), are ones which would do well from Frampton's framework and could indeed be argued to speak to another, non-verbal and non-literary side, and are encounters which create a vague kind of

experience and understanding, led by a visceral and visual connection through sound, image and colour. Ostensibly, films such as these would seem to encourage an engagement with the film's content and form in the organic and lyrical fashion proposed by Frampton, and not entirely dependent on our uncovering of each of the films' meanings.

Although clearly the methodology of much of film studies – the generic codes and conventions imposed from earlier disciplines of literary theory and linguistics – often truncate the subversive potential and polysemies of meaning that are made available through the visual, Frampton's conceptualisation of the 'free-floating' prelinguistic filmind and the formulation of his 'contemplative filmgoer' are problematic. As a constructed artefact, moving images in film post-date language and are radically different than static ones. Derived from Lacanian theory, Frampton's suggestion of a prelinguistic entity echoes that of the pre-symbolic Imaginary, in which the image takes precedence – before symbolism and meaning prevail. But Frampton ignores the fact that, for Lacan, the Imaginary is topological, rather than chronological: one exists alongside the other; the Lacanian Real breaks through to destabilise the fixity of meaning and the semiotic at the same time as encoding it. The fact that meaning and communication of film's 'essence' can never truly be made clear is a problem of language and an excess of the signified. One of the fundamental problems with Frampton's raptures regarding the unspoiled virgin of film-going, is that his rhetoric imagines the ideal film-goer as the highly individualised, paracultural and para-social being of the pre-symbolic, and his ideas are reduced to a sense of the overwhelming and overpowering medium of film, something akin to the notion of a Kantian sublime, rather than a practicable solution to the crisis of forward direction faced by contemporary film studies.

Set out in a fashion that is clearly intended to take the reader through each stage of his agenda for change, Frampton sets down the parameters of his discourse by outlining the history of twentieth century theories about film and the mind, phenomenology, and issues of narration, subjectivity and authorship in film. His book, which often becomes entangled in the 'technicist' and theoretical language he seems to disparage regarding film criticism, name-checks significant theorists with military precision, and the opening section of the book sets up an expectation that is not clearly delivered in the 'second half'. For example, Frampton's strident prose and ardent beliefs mask a range of questions regarding the practicalities of his new agenda. The author does not offer a sustained use of his own methodology regarding how we are supposed to write about film. Not only this, but Frampton's exposition of several films also leaves much to be desired. In talking about *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malik 1998), Frampton's version of filmosophical writing extends as far as four lines:

> New forms of cinema, whether in *Fight Club* or *The Thin Red Line*, create spaces for new thoughtful rhetorics, of colours and silence, and subjective flights and relations. (With *The Thin Red Line* I remember drinking-in the

thread of character thoughts – the filmmind passing through the heads of its characters like a metaphysical bird.)

(Frampton 2006: 177)

As lyrical as phrases like these are, their impact falls short of the long-awaited punchline. Furthermore, the book's impassioned prose neglects much of the new, exciting work going on in film and media studies which springs from developments in technology, and which reflect the new direction and potentially evolutionary stage we are at, regarding our relationship with the technologically reproduced image.

Frampton focuses the majority of his examples on European cinema, and 'pure cinema', with scant and seemingly obligatory references to mainstream film-making, such as several lines on *The Matrix* (Larry and Andy Wachowski 1999), *Patch Adams* (Tom Shadyac 1998), and the above-mentioned films. For a book that beckons the 'filmgoer' to join him in a new way of thinking about, perceiving, and experiencing film, an idea he presents apropos an all-embracing 'world-view' of the medium, the volume avoids a greater part of the cinematic world. As such, the volume's second half leads to an impasse: an anti-climax to its ardently felt prologue. While Frampton's passion is seductive, and he appropriately suggests a need to establish a methodology to talk about film and the visual that is distinct from that which comes out of literary theory, his attempt to develop a poetics of film, seems to offer one mode of technicist language and methodology in place of another without fully justifying its replacement.

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